

THE SHELTERING TREE

NOVELS BY NETTA SYRETT

FULFILMENT

ANGEL UNAWARES

LINDA

JUDGMENT WITHHELD

PORTRAIT OF A REBEL

STRANGE MARRIAGE

AUNT ELIZABETH

THE SHUTTLES OF ETERNITY

THE MANOR HOUSE

THE FARM ON THE DOWNS

JULIAN CARROLL

THE VICTORIANS

ONE OF THREE

THE PATH TO THE SUN

THE HOUSE IN GARDEN SQUARE

NETTA SYRETT

The Sheltering Tree

"Friendship is a sheltering tree"

COLERIDGE

GEOFFREY BLES

TWO MANCHESTER SQUARE
LONDON

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY J. AND J. GRAY
EDINBURGH

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1939

PREFACE

SOME time ago, when a friend suggested that I should write my "memoirs," the idea seemed to me, if not actually absurd, at least unlikely to be of much interest to anyone even if I adopted it. Compared with the exciting existences led by many women of the past, as well as of the present age, mine appeared too ordinary to be worth recording, and though to me autobiography, whether quiet or spectacular, always makes a strong appeal, I thought this a mere personal taste, unshared by a sufficient number of people to justify an attempt to write anything about my own comparatively uneventful life.

Scarcely giving it a thought, I put the suggestion aside and had all but forgotten it when, as it chanced, I happened to read, one after the other, a number of novels dealing with the terribly restricted life led by women whose youth coincided with mine, and I began to think that perhaps a counterblast to this picture might conceivably be due.

It could, I reflected, do no harm to show that some at least of the old ladies of to-day enjoyed in their youth almost as much freedom as any modern girl, even though motor-cars were non-existent, cocktails unknown, and aeroplanes a wild dream of a few crazy prophets of "things to come."

In writing of the Victorian era the younger novelists seem to have forgotten that what is known as the "Woman's Movement" was in the 'eighties already well recognized, and in the 'nineties in full swing. Except for that section of society which spells itself with a capital letter, educated girls of any character, all over the country,

PREFACE

were asserting their right to independence if they could prove themselves capable of earning their own living. Or for that matter, even if they couldn't or didn't!

Many, it is true, had to face parental opposition and fight for their liberty, but others, of whom I am one, had no such obstacles to overcome.

In spite of all that has been written in his dispraise, the Victorian father was not invariably a tyrant, and there must be hundreds of women who, like myself, remember with gratitude the tolerant attitude of their parents towards much that could scarcely be expected to please them. Theoretically, then, an excuse for writing something about my own life being found, there is nothing to prevent me from at once proceeding to do so. Actually, I find the task of deciding where to begin unexpectedly difficult.

Which thread out of the tangled skein memory shows me shall I choose for the unravelling of the past? Much of that past I have no intention of unravelling at all, since, in spite of the modern craze for "frankness," I continue to hold the old-fashioned opinion that what concerns me alone is no concern of anyone else.

This will not therefore, indeed *cannot*, be a "womb to tomb" record of my life. It is only in a novel that the author, acting as God Almighty, can be in at the birth as well as the death of his characters. So what I am now proposing to write are a few reminiscences, chosen, so far as possible, for the light they may throw upon a past in many ways different from the present age, yet for me, at least, not too circumscribed, not too lacking in freedom.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. SCHOOL	9
II. THE C.T.C.	33
III. A VISIT	42
IV. THE SWANSEA HIGH SCHOOL	52
V. LONDON	65
VI. FRIENDS—AND MARRIAGES	89
VII. FRIENDS AND PARTIES	95
VIII. AN UNORTHODOX SCHOOL	107
IX. THE "PLAYGOERS' PLAY"	116
X. STILL THEATRICAL	128
XI. ITALY AND THE RIVIERA	138
XII. ENTER "PETER" BY WAY OF <i>THE DREAM</i> GARDEN	147
XIII. PARIS	153
XIV. THE THORPS AND "THE DECOY"	159
XV. JACK	167
XVI. THOMAS HARDY—THE PEN CLUB	192
XVII. THE PRE-WAR RUSSIAN BALLET: PLAYS AND PAGEANTS	200
XVIII. SOHO SQUARE	208
XIX. THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE	214
XX. THE OUTBREAK OF WAR	222

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXI. HAMILTON TERRACE	234
XXII. ITALY AGAIN	244
XXIII. EBURY STREET	255
XXIV. "SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON"	273

CHAPTER I

SCHOOL

I WILL begin with my schooldays, choosing them as a starting-point, because it may not be without interest to modern readers to contrast the schools of to-day with—shall I say?—those of the day before yesterday.

Omitting the “governess at home” phase of my rather sketchy education, I come to my first sight of that awe-inspiring lady, Miss Frances Mary Buss, founder of the North London Collegiate School for Girls, then as now, and always with justice, considered a great figure in the educational world. I was eleven, and the sister who shared this experience a year younger, when she first swam into our ken (a really excellent description, by the way, of the gait that distinguished her from those who *merely walked!*).

My sister Dora and I had been duly entered as pupils at the “North London,” as boarders at the private house of its headmistress, and the school term was to begin on the Monday following that memorable Saturday.

A somewhat long train journey, and then a drive across London in a four-wheeler, brought us in the evening, with our father, to the door of Myra Lodge, a corner house in King Henry’s Road at the foot of Primrose Hill. Here Miss Buss received about thirty girls whose homes, like ours, were out of London. We were ushered into a well-furnished drawing-room and kept waiting some considerable time—a nerve-racking interval, my father’s attempt to fill it with cheerful talk entirely failing to cheer two frightened little girls, aware that in

a few minutes he would leave them to face a strange new life alone.

Presently the door was flung open and the lady of the house swept in with a movement suggestive of a strong swimmer breasting opposing waves. Head thrown well back, handsome silk dress swaying in a way oddly reminiscent of the long outmoded crinoline, she came forward to shake hands with us, and after exchanging a word or two with my father, remarked that as it was already late we must say good-bye to him at once. . . .

In thinking of Miss Buss it is impossible for me not to recall simultaneously the figure of Queen Victoria. Like her, she was very short, rather stout, and again, she carried herself with almost as much dignity and with quite as much sense of her own importance as that royal lady. The round, soft-skinned face, the short nose, the hair, even then white, smoothly parted on the forehead and surmounted by a lace cap, increased the resemblance to the Sovereign so long to reign over us. So also did the hands, short, white, plump, adorned with one or two valuable rings.

The four years that I spent under the roof of this remarkable woman confirmed my first impression of her physical likeness to Queen Victoria, and in addition gave me ample opportunity to become acquainted with her varying moods.

Of these, more hereafter.

At the moment I wish to apologize in advance if in the course of these pages I make too frequent reference to my own novels.

Self-advertisement, I think I may safely claim, is not one of my many failings (I should be considerably better off financially if it *had* been), but the fact is that in my earlier books I have made more use of personal

experiences than I quite realized when I undertook this backward glance with all it involves. It must be my excuse for mentioning them.

Part of *The Victorians*, for instance, gives an almost photographic picture of life at Myra Lodge, a circumstance, by the way, which did not deter a cocksure American reviewer from . . . But a delightful thought suddenly strikes me! For years I have wished, but been too lazy, to say a few not altogether kind words about certain reviewers. Not on account of adverse criticism, though, for by most of them I have been remarkably well treated.

All in good time, however. As yet I am only a homesick little girl unaware of the very existence of reviewers, or that their activities would ever have anything to do with *me*.

So to return to that first evening at Myra Lodge; and by way of comparing the treatment of children then, with that they now receive, I ask if it would be possible in these days for anyone connected with a school to find two little girls seated on the floor of a bleak bedroom crying bitterly, without some attempt at consolation?

But the woman who bustled in a few minutes after our father had gone, having presumably overheard us exchanging a tearful word or two, merely remarked, "You're not allowed to talk in the bedrooms. It's against the rules"; and after standing over us while we miserably searched for our nightgowns in half-unpacked luggage, left us without another word.

This engaging individual's name in *The Victorians* is Miss Bird, and "Miss Bird" she shall here remain.

An undersized, mean-looking woman, I despised more than I hated her, ingenious though she was in finding occasions to harass the younger girls; but pity

now robs me of any satisfaction in the memory of my dislike for this poor little general factotum. Herself frequently bullied by Miss Buss, of whom she went in terror, her life must have been wretched enough to account for a sadistic twist in the turning of the worm. But she was the type of woman who should never have entered the house of a headmistress of any social or intellectual standing, and as I write I cannot repress a chuckle to remember how this was pointed out to Miss Buss herself by my mother, in whom for once she met her match.

Though I was not present, and only much later heard of it, I picture the encounter which must have taken place a term or two after we went to school.

The scene is laid in the drawing-room at Myra Lodge, and my mother (probably in town for the day) is casting a withering glance at the retreating form of Miss Bird, who, having been called in to give evidence against me for some misdemeanour, is hurriedly making her escape. When the door closes upon the little woman she turns to Miss Buss.

(I may here remark that both ladies possessed what is known as "presence." Both were dominating personalities, though my mother had a gift denied to Miss Buss—that of charm.)

"Do you really think high-spirited children are likely to respect a woman of *that* sort?" my mother demands, and the elder autocrat, staggered, makes no direct reply.

I have since heard that Miss Buss respected anyone who stood up to her, and this good trait in her character probably accounts for what followed.

"Netta is very like you in disposition, Mrs. Syrett,"

she observed, after a pause ; and as though slightly amused at the novelty of being criticized, I am told she actually smiled!

Even the *Netta* was a concession, for "little" or pet names were not encouraged, and as I was baptized *Janet* (except at "Myra," where I retained the name, by which from babyhood I have been known), throughout my school years I answered to the unfamiliar "Janet."

Curiously enough, just as I begin to write of Miss Buss, she and the school she founded have become current "news," and in an article entitled "A School Moves House: The History of the North London Collegiate School, told by an old pupil," I read that "*Grown too big for the buildings in Camden Road the school will move some six hundred pupils . . . and last, but not least, the School Tradition, out to Canon's Park, a dignified eighteenth-century mansion standing in extensive parkland at Edgware. . . .*"

The "old pupil" responsible for this article in the magazine called *Good Housekeeping* for February 1938 is Stella Gibbons, a talented young writer of to-day, who, as she did not enter the school till 1915, has had to rely for her information about its founder upon the *Life of Miss Buss*, by Miss Annie Ridley, who knew her when the school was young. I confess that as I put the magazine down after reading this article I echoed the question of "jesting Pilate!" For in the portrait of Miss Buss (necessarily a "copy," since she had been dead twenty years by the time Stella Gibbons entered the school) I found no resemblance to the woman I knew. If Miss Ridley had ever been a boarder at Myra Lodge I wonder if she would still have attributed to her the quality of "motherliness" among all the other gentle characteristics with which she endows her?

"Motherliness!"—of a woman whose very voice in the

distance inspired fear in my delicate sister, whom she once peremptorily forbade to cough.

Some months later this child died of tuberculosis. Would a "motherly" woman have missed signs of illness so apparent to every one else?

One is not surprised to read in the "life" that "in 1877 Miss Buss was only sixty years old, but she looked eighty. *She had worn herself out.*" Sad enough for Miss Buss herself, of course, but one is tempted to add, scarcely less so for some of the girls who lived in the house of a "worn-out" nerve-ridden woman! For though "nerves," if mentioned at all by her, were treated with withering scorn, of all the people in her house, whether adults or children, the most neurotic subject undoubtedly was its mistress.

Her violent temper, her restless energy, her inability to listen to an explanation before judging a case, her sudden transition from vehement denunciation to the embrace, enveloping some girl who, given a quiet hearing, might have cleared herself from an unfounded accusation, were certainly symptoms of the very nerves she derided. At the risk of precipitating vials of wrath upon my impious head from those who no doubt with good reason revere her memory, I give it as my considered opinion that, many as were her excellent qualities, Miss Buss was the last woman on earth who should have come into intimate relationship with children, or even with any but the most placid and docile of young girls.

To me, living in the same house with her was like breathing the electric atmosphere of an impending storm, which all too frequently—broke.

By the way she opened a door, rustled a newspaper, or pushed things about on a table, I learnt to recognize what I once heard a former pupil to whom the letter *r* presented difficulty, call "the pwemonitorwy symptoms

of a wow." And a "wow" in which I was almost certain to be involved.

My own relationship with the lady, to quote Charles Lamb's admirable phrase, was one of "imperfect sympathy." She never liked me, and with a curious mingling of fear and secret amusement, I returned the dislike—with interest. It was her curious diction when enraged that accounted for the amusement. Sooner or later the word *forsooth* would occur in the midst of torrents of invective. I used to wait for it, and hail it when it came, with a fearful joy mingled with terror lest I might not be able to restrain a giggle.

But even this dangerous solace failed me when her temper led her into acts of flagrant injustice. The anger and indignation these acts aroused were deplorable emotions for a child to experience, especially when contempt was not infrequently added to them.

I remember an occasion when she quoted at me the Biblical proverb, "He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." Had she forgotten a scene which only a few weeks previously had taken place in St. Albans Cathedral, when, under a wrong impression that I had disobeyed an order of hers, and to the amazement of a party of tourists, she had violently shaken and loudly denounced me in the House of God itself?

I had not. I have never forgotten it, nor that neither then, nor at any subsequent time, was I allowed to speak in my own defence. Nor again that this was by no means a solitary instance of the victory of temper over justice!

A sense of irony in the very young is to be deprecated. It is not pretty, and for its too early appearance in my character my headmistress cannot be held entirely blameless. . . .

Alas, poor lady! I can now find excuses for her which no child could be expected either to make or to under-

stand. Her youth was one of hardship and struggle, and a temper that could never have been equable was not improved by overwork.

No doubt pecuniary considerations made it necessary for her to take boarders, but from every other point of view, including her own, it was a great mistake. That she was in many ways a great woman, that she accomplished a great work, no one is more ready to admit than I. But to attribute to her the gentle qualities she did not possess is to give a false picture of a very remarkable character. I am to this day capable of a faint thrill of indignation when I recall the quite needless suffering she caused me and certain others of my generation.

The Victorians, as I have already mentioned, contains a detailed account of life both at Myra Lodge and at the school, but as I cannot flatter myself that any of the present generation know the novel, I will describe a few of the curious proceedings and rules at the boarding-house.

There was, for instance, a ledger called indiscriminately the Appearing Book, or the Register, from which a humorist might have derived a considerable amount of amusement.

Could some memory of the Recording Angel have been in the mind of Miss Buss when she instituted it? I wonder. For in the "Appearing Book" every departure from a rule, or from correct conduct, was entered, not, however, by any angelic being, but by the culprit herself, with signature attached.

Pages and pages of this volume contained futilities like the following: *I didn't put my shoes in my locker* (signed), *I hung my coat on the wrong peg* (signed), *I left my work-bag about* (signed). But every now and then the seeker after excitement would be rewarded by such an avowal as, *I knocked a boy down with my muff*.

The laconically recorded incident being still fresh in my memory, I am able to gratify curiosity, though not, I fear, the hope of crime. The emergence of the "Myra" boarders from the school after morning lessons coincided with the release of hordes of boys from *their* imprisonment, and a favourite trick of these young hooligans was to rush between the ranks of our two and two procession, jostling us, and impairing the symmetry of the "crocodile."

One day a hefty young woman, laying about her with a muff rapidly transferred from hand to hand, felled to the earth a youth surprised by the sudden onslaught. The derisive laughter of his fellows, as very red in the face he picked himself up, was music in our ears, but though I have forgotten the consequences to the Amazon, other than "signing" for what *we* considered a valiant deed, I'm sure they were serious.

Some idea for our improvement must have led Miss Buss to introduce that idiotic Register into the "home life" at Myra Lodge, but what it could have been I cannot imagine.

My own contribution to it was on a lavish scale, but if by any chance it was designed to foster a sense of neatness, order, and general rectitude, in my case, at least, it lamentably failed.

Then to the uninitiated there was the strange rite that took place every morning after prayers. Standing at the head of one of the long tables in the dining-room, Miss Bird read the roll-call, and as the name of each girl was reached, its owner replied *Present—Not spoken*, or alternatively (but very rarely) *Present—spoken*. These cryptic utterances referred to the rule that from the time we entered our bedrooms at night till we left them next morning not a word was to be uttered.

As an example of bad legislation and lack of common

sense, this rule could scarcely be surpassed. No talking after lights were out would have been reasonable, but to expect girls to keep silence for many consecutive hours was to ask too much surely from youthful human nature? A few high-minded young women did, I believe, act in a Washingtonian manner, but the rest of us, considerably lower than the angels, and already overburdened with rules, lied cheerfully, and felt ourselves justified.

We Myra Lodge boarders had good reason to envy the day girls, who at least had only *one* set of rules to obey, while we were subject to the regulations of both establishments, and thus seemed to achieve the impossible by simultaneously living in two schools at one and the same time. So thick and fast do memories crowd upon me that selection from them grows ever more difficult. Yet a curious performance which took place on Saturday mornings in the summer (Saturday being a whole holiday at the school) deserves description.

For what in my young days was considered a very up-to-date education, opportunity for physical exercise at "Myra" was singularly lacking. Though in schools of less note games already formed part of the curriculum, we boarders had no outdoor sports at all.

There was no room even for a tennis-court in the tiny gardens at the back of the two connected houses known as Myra Lodge, and at the "North London" School itself, in my day, no inch of playground existed. In a woman so advanced as Miss Buss it seems strange that some field was not acquired for the use of her boarders. Instead, with that lack of humour which so often characterized her plans for our benefit, she engaged a drill-sergeant to exercise us.

Clad in long flannel dressing-gowns, the "big girls" stiffly corseted, we assembled in one of the small gardens at the back of the house, where we marched and counter-

marched, left-turned and formed fours, to the raucous shouts of an elderly soldier.

At the first martial yell every window in the many houses overlooking the garden was thrown up, and to the intense discomfort of those girls who at seventeen and eighteen looked and *were* grown-up young ladies, the neighbours enjoyed a ludicrous spectacle entirely free of charge.

As a change from the dull roads and streets leading to the school, our Saturday afternoon walks took us sometimes to Regent's Park, sometimes to Hampstead Heath, the way to it—Swiss Cottage once passed—winding through fields where now there are acres of shops, flats, and villas. It was country—of a not very inspiring kind, certainly—but still *country* all the way to the Heath in those days, and as we were allowed to take books to read when we got there, I welcomed a "Heath" afternoon.

Accustomed to read anything I pleased at home, I resented having to take books for the first year or two from the shelves allotted to the little ones. To be handed *Ministering Children* when I wanted *Hypatia* or *Prince Otto* was gall and wormwood to me, and I generally managed to borrow from one of the elder girls something more to my taste, even at the risk of the all too probable question from Authority, "*Netta Syrett, what are you reading?*"

One of the books I had brought with me from home when I was about thirteen was Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, which, strangely enough, had captured my imagination. (Years later I was thrilled to discover it to be a taste I shared with Keats!) That children take from books only as much as they understand, ignoring all that as yet has no significance for them, I have long been aware, and this has always seemed to me an argu-

ment for non-interference with the reading of the young. The opinion is confirmed by my reaction to Miss Buss's confiscation of my Lemprière. "It is a clumsy book which I don't wish you to read," she said, and as she walked off with the offending volume I began to wonder why. Up to that moment in perfect innocence (if anyone had been so unwise as to set it) I could have passed an examination in the stories of the gods and goddesses, sexual vagaries and all, for I looked upon these as part of the general incomprehensibility of grown-up people. But when the book was removed I never rested till I knew, at least dimly, why I was not allowed to keep it in my possession. How much wiser was my grandfather (to whom the Lemprière originally belonged) when, probably amused at my interest, he made me a present of the book!

So far I have made no mention of the social life at "Myra," nor of the school-fellows who made that life always more than tolerable, and sometimes even happy and interesting. To that aspect of my four years there I will return. It is time now to speak of the celebrated North London Collegiate School for the sake of which Myra Lodge existed.

It was an ugly building of very considerable size, for even in my day it housed five hundred girls. When I think of it I see large, airy, bleak-looking class-rooms, their floor space covered with "Swedish desks" of a wasp-like yellow. I think of long passages; of stone stair-cases; of a hall with a vaulted roof complete with platform and organ, where we assembled for prayers. I see files of girls marching along corridors, or popping in and out of cloak-rooms like rabbits in a warren. I hear form mistresses chanting, "*Left, right, left, right!* Single file! No talking on the stairs," and also a strange, harsh,

clicking sound, later to be explained—and I am thankful that for me all this regimentation and bleakness is long, long since over and done with for ever!

Some while ago I came across a book called *A London Girl of the 'Eighties*, in which the "North London" school and all the teachers in it, including Miss Buss herself, are described.

I have since met its author, Mrs. Vivian Hughes, who *entered* the school at the same age as I left it, and a talk with her made me realize, even more clearly than I already knew it, how far too young, by young and inexperienced parents, my sister and I were sent to a school in which little of real value was taught till one reached the Fifth and Sixth Forms. Except in the upper classes the lessons on the whole, at their best, were uninspiring, and at their worst, actually bad. I remember only one mistress (a sister, as I afterwards learnt, of Mary Davies the singer) whose lessons in Botany and History I enjoyed. She must, of course, have been that rare individual, a good teacher, and as she possessed the added gift of beauty, my pleasure in her teaching is readily accounted for.

I left too young to reach the Sixth, where Dr. Sophie Bryant (later to follow Miss Buss as headmistress) was the presiding spirit. But though to my regret I never had a lesson from her, always attracted by her humorous face and Irish voice, I remember her very distinctly. It sometimes happened, probably when a less important mistress was ill, that she took cloak-room duty, and she used then to address me as *Young Person*, ("Now, Young Person, away with you!") when I was dawdling over dressing, or chattering to a friend. She was evidently amused by the younger girls, with whom she had little or nothing to do, and I well remember her tolerant smile when, as often happened, she *shooed* me out of the cloak-

room. Many, many years have passed since I last saw her, but I was grieved as well as shocked to read of her tragic death in Switzerland some time ago. Perhaps if I had ever come under her influence my memories of the "North London" would be pleasanter than in fact they are. I hated what to me was the depressing atmosphere of the school and its surroundings in one of London's dreariest regions, and as a born individualist I hated also the regimentation of the place.

I have lately reflected that many of the devices instituted by Miss Buss for the furtherance of discipline and order would find favour in a modern totalitarian state. A dictator would doubtless view with approbation a curious object which lay on the desk of every teacher in the Lower School—that object responsible for the harsh, clicking sound to which I have already alluded. It was called "the Clacker," and so far as it is possible to describe it, Mrs. Vivian Hughes has done so in her amusing book. Raised and depressed by a lever, it emitted a most irritating noise, and was manipulated in accordance with a code. One "clack" meant *stand*, two "clacks" (possibly) *sit*; but thank heaven I have long since forgotten which, and only remember it as part of the mechanized order I so detested. Presumably designed to save the teachers' voices, it was used by some of them in dictating notes: one clack standing for a comma, two for a semicolon; and so forth. A ridiculous invention it was, more suited to robots than to human teachers and children, and probably as much disliked by the majority of those constrained to use it as by girls who, like me, found the noise intensely irritating. But as Miss Buss's vigilance in the school was as unceasing as at Myra Lodge the clacker continued to clack. At any moment a class-room door might be flung open to disclose that small, stout, commanding presence, and

then woe to any subordinate who was not making full use of the gadgets she had supplied!

A familiar sight every morning was the "growler" waiting at the entrance gate of "Myra" to convey our headmistress to the scene of her activities in the school of her creation.

"*So-ana-so, you're to go down in the cab to-day!*" This announcement snapped at one or other of us by Miss Bird was a frightful possibility hanging over the head of anyone with a bad cold, or some other ailment which rendered the sufferer unfit to walk, but perfectly fit to receive instruction.

The matron with a thermometer was not as yet an institution in schools, and such a thing as a temperature, even if known, was never mentioned. But most of us survived.

True though it is that I was more often unhappy than happy during my schooldays, and that even now after a dream in which I am once more a girl at "Myra" I wake thanking heaven to find myself full of years, if not of honour, there were, of course, many interludes when life even there was a gay enough affair to me.

There were weeks when I escaped the attentions of Miss Buss, and to counteract the unpleasant Miss Bird there were in authority at "Myra" the kindly, human Miss Fawcett and the nice old housekeeper, Miss Paul, both of whom liked me.

That I made no effort to see Miss Fawcett after I was grown up is one of the many sins of omission that trouble my conscience. She died many years ago, and I can only hope that if she read my early novel, *The Victorians*, she recognized herself in the sympathetic mistress at "Minerva House." Though perfectly loyal, I am sure that she disapproved of Miss Buss's violence, and discretion itself so far as any open display of sympathy

was concerned, I know she often interceded for me during the progress of "a row."

Miss Paul, also kind, though *not* discreet, was very deaf, and her sympathy was dangerous because, like many deaf people, she did not realize how loud her voice was. I remember her wagging her finger at me one day, and with twinkling eyes, and in a stentorian tone, declaring, "*You're a very naughty girl!*" adding in what no doubt she thought a confidential whisper, but was more like a fog-horn in full blast, "*But between ourselves, I like the naughty ones best!*"

To have replied that the really naughty things I was constantly doing were never found out, and that it was always what I *hadn't* done that led to "rows," would have meant shouting. So, for fear of listening ears by no means deaf, I had to leave the situation unexplained.

On the pleasurable side of existence were the concerts and theatres to which we "Myra" boarders were occasionally taken. During my first term I was one of five or six girls escorted by Miss Fawcett to the old St. James's Hall one Saturday afternoon, and though I was too young to appreciate the music, I had something else to interest me.

"Do you see that lady with the white shawl a few rows away?" asked Miss Fawcett, by whom I was seated. "That's George Eliot, the novelist. She's Mrs. Cross now, but she still uses her writing name."

I had read *The Mill on the Floss*, and I gazed with excitement at the shawl a few seats in front of me, and longed for the wearer (who to be recognized must have turned round) to do so again. She did not, and to this day George Eliot exists for me as a back covered by a shawl of white cashmere folded three-corner wise.

I shall never forget, either, my first sight of Ellen Terry at the Lyceum when I was about fourteen. The

play was *Much Ado about Nothing*, and as Beatrice she enthralled me. She was so lovely to look at, so gaily impertinent in her exchange of repartee with Benedick—played, of course, by Irving—that for days afterwards lessons and the chatter of my school-friends were tiresome interruptions to the re-living of every moment she was on the stage.

The Corney Grain entertainments, so “safe,” so “funny without being vulgar,” such a godsend to elders in search of something entirely innocuous for the young, though destitute of the thrill of a real theatre, were by no means despised by me, for Corney Grain was certainly clever, and on the memory of his songs, *You should see me dance the Polka*, or *The Fatherland, the Happy Fatherland*, I can still bestow a smile of amusement.

Even at “Myra,” in the usual course of things, there were certain hours I wholeheartedly enjoyed. To the weekly dancing class, for instance, I looked forward from one Wednesday till the next, for, in addition to my delight in dancing, to me, more accustomed to blame than praise, it was pleasant to receive the latter in unstinted measure from the funny old lady who taught us. A girl called Beatrice Maitland (still my friend) and I were the show pupils on dancing nights, and very pleased with ourselves and one another we were!

Then there were the evenings when Miss Buss read aloud to us after supper while we remained seated at the long tables.

She read remarkably well, and as I very early appreciated a voice of good quality and clear enunciation, I enjoyed those half-hours, especially as the books she chose were often amusing, and always in some way charming. Such, for example, was *Carrots*, one of Mrs. Molesworth’s simple but beautiful stories, and as I recall it I see as vividly as though I had left it yesterday

the room in which we sat. It was a spacious one, its walls painted a pleasant green (Myra Lodge suggested a private rather than a school-house, for it was well decorated, and downstairs, at least, comfortably furnished). I see Miss Buss, at her best in one of her gentler moods, and the young faces of girls with whom I was once intimate. Many of them are dead. Most of those still alive, of whom now and again news reaches me, are grandmothers, and to the grandchildren of several of them I am aunt by adoption. It is when I think of these, the youngest generation already growing so swiftly out of childhood, that I hear *Time's winged Chariot* most clearly!

But to return to what children of to-day call "the olden times."

I suppose my academic triumphs, few though they were, must be counted among pleasurable experiences. One of these dwells in my memory chiefly because it is associated with an unexpected moment of kindness from Miss Buss.

For some reason which I forget, an examination paper was set by a botanist unconnected with the school, and a few girls from certain forms known to be interested in the subject were chosen to enter for it. I was the youngest of those selected.

The examination was held in the hall, and finding the questions easy I wrote up to the last moment like mad, characteristically neglecting to place the pages in order. When the examiner reached my desk after collecting all the other papers, I was still feverishly sorting them. All the other candidates had left the hall, and to add horror to my confusion at keeping the great man waiting, Miss Buss appeared on the scene.

But instead of storming as I expected, she put her hand kindly on my shoulder.

SCHOOL

"This child might do very well," she observed to the waiting examiner, "if only——" I forget the end of the sentence, but years later I realized that the remark was the key to much of the disfavour with which she regarded me. She knew I was not altogether stupid, and, intensely ambitious for the school, chose to believe that nothing but obstinacy prevented me from gaining proficiency in arithmetic, without which none of those academic honours proclaiming its glory could be gained. "*Because, forsooth, you don't happen to like arithmetic!*" How well I remember that sentence, and the repressed giggle it never failed to provoke! I disappointed her, and perhaps that in part accounted for an attitude towards me that was certainly not affectionate.

But I am forgetting to record my triumph! When the result of the examination came out, my name headed the list with one mark short of the maximum. I don't remember many congratulations, but I was secretly puffed up with sinful pride to see the names of Sixth Form girls below my own. Yet even this success faded before the excitement of having some of my early literary efforts accepted by the editor of the School Magazine—open to contributions from all North Londoners.

Two of these effusions were entirely my own. A third, an historical romance in which the history and the romance somehow changed places, was perpetrated in collaboration with a "Myra" girl a little older than myself. . . .

The last time I looked over the palings of that memory-haunted little garden at the back of Myra Lodge, not so many years ago, the ramshackle arbour in which Janie and I used to thrill with the excitement of composition was still standing. I thought of Janie—long since dead—and of myself as a child, eager, excited, absorbed, and such chaotic emotions suddenly assailed me that I hurried away, vowing never to pass that way again.

THE SHELTERING TREE

Even the routine at the school had its monotony broken by occasional excitements, the most important of these being a certain prize-giving attended by the future King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, then Prince and Princess of Wales. At intervals for weeks before the great day we assembled in the hall to practise our loyal song of greeting, *God Bless the Prince of Wales*, and also the curtsies to be performed by the prize-winners, of whom I was one. While I recognized this as good luck, I dreaded the ordeal of mounting the platform under the gaze of hundreds of eyes, certain I should forget my curtsy, or otherwise disgrace myself.

The day duly arrived, and at the entrance of the royal visitors, escorted by Miss Buss in her best cap, five hundred girls in white sprang to their feet to greet their future king with appropriate melody. As one of the white-robed band, I had no eyes for anyone or anything but the Princess, who to me was lovely as any lady in a fairy-tale. It was in those days the fashion to wear real flowers, and she had, I remember, a spray of red roses fastened to the left shoulder of a filmy dark-blue dress, long enough to reach its waist. As I rose from my curtsy to take my prize from her hand I looked straight into her very beautiful smiling blue eyes, which I recall to this day as clearly as I also remember the absurd incident that followed.

The girl who preceded me in the stream of prize-winners crossing the platform was a very handsome half-caste, who at fifteen or so looked a fully developed woman. Instead of the curtsy we had been told to make in passing the Prince, she gave him an impudent little nod and such a provocative roll of her huge black eyes that I scarcely wonder at the quick turn of his head as he watched her off the platform. My belief that he shared my shocked dismay at her lack of respect, and even

intended to report the brazen hussy to Miss Buss, was genuine. But that flicker of a smile on the royal countenance when he acknowledged the correct obeisance of a little girl who knew her place and her manners somewhat puzzled me!

The best of the pleasant things that four not altogether happy years at school gave me I have left till the last. They are two lifelong friendships.

Beatrice Maitland, a day girl already mentioned as sharing with me the honours of the dancing class, and her sister Edith, used to walk to and fro to the school with the "Myra" boarders, and as Dora and I were for some time considerably the youngest of the boarders, and these children were of our age and lived quite close, we were sometimes allowed to spend Saturday afternoons with them. In our first term it was most comforting to have tea in a room, and with a family that reminded us of home. For there were brothers about the same age as our brothers, and we played the kind of games we loved and had been used to in our own playroom. Edith, the elder of the two girls, is dead, but Beatrice is still the friend with whom I can exchange reminiscences of those far-off years, when she and I were at the age her eldest grandchild has just reached!

It was during my second term that a girl called May Somers came as weekly boarder to "Myra." Her assured manner, with its complete absence of the timidity considered appropriate in a "new girl," as well as her quickness in repartee, filled me with amused admiration, and it was not long before we became friends. Though only six months my senior, she seemed so amazingly "grown up" that I was surprised and flattered at her notice of me, for as one of a very large family I had lived chiefly with children, while she, accustomed at home to the

society of her elders, was socially advanced for her age.

As time went on and we grew older, I used to listen breathlessly on Mondays at the mid-morning "break" to accounts of the theatre-going and the parties she enjoyed at the week-end.

She had boy cousins older than herself, who of course had friends, so this "woman of the world," as I considered her, actually knew Young Men! And how grand that seemed to me! What a proof of the grown-upness I felt I should never attain!

All through our lives, till the long, tragic illness which clouded and at last completely darkened that quick, alert brain of hers, we corresponded, and generally met several times a year. I knew her as wife, mother, grandmother. She had a faculty amounting to genius for gracious home-making, and the lovely house, with its equally lovely garden, in which she and her family lived so long, became dear and familiar enough to me to make the thought of it now in the possession of strangers a personal grief.

It was mercifully hidden from me that I should ever be thankful to hear of her death. I am even more thankful for my belief that one day, and then as all and more of her old attractive self, I shall again meet the May Cleverly I first knew as May Somers.

At the age of fifteen I left school and, except for parting from my friends, without regret.

My relations with Miss Buss did not improve, and I was tired of "scenes."

She has been dead many years, God rest her soul! and the evil that she did—and some evil there *was*—shall be interred with her bones. It is the *good* that will live after her, and of that there is enough to make her name

long remembered. As one of the foremost educationists of her time, by her zeal and untiring energy she raised the standard of education for women to heights undreamed of in early Victorian days, and thousands of women have cause to be grateful that she lived.

Even I, black sheep in her eyes though I was, had reason to thank her for help when I decided to take up a profession.

Four years after I left the school, during a visit I was paying to my friends the Maitlands, I went to see her.

It was strange to enter that drawing-room at Myra Lodge as a grown-up girl and to hear once more the well-remembered peremptory voice.

"Now, my dear child, if you want to teach, you must go to the Cambridge Training College. The term has already begun there, so you've no time to lose. I will write to your father to-night."

She did. And I went.

³Aware that I have not drawn too favourable a picture of my schooldays, I hasten to say it is one which some even of the "Myra" boarders might not recognize as, in their experience, true. Those of them who never came into conflict with Miss Buss may even have enjoyed the years they spent under her roof. Moreover, the North London School with its adjunct Myra Lodge was by no means typical of educational establishments in my young day. Many others existed where life was less strenuous and more enjoyable.

For one term before she was ill, Dora joined two younger sisters already at a country school, and when we met at the beginning of the holidays I remember her exclaiming, "Oh! it's a *lovely* school, Netta!"

"I was most *awfully* happy there!" one of the younger

sisters (now a grandmother) only the other day said to me.

Yet compared with Miss Buss, the headmistress of that much-loved school was not only inferior in intellect, but also in nobility of character. She knew how to make girls happy, though. Let moralists take note.

CHAPTER II

THE C.T.C.

AS the eldest of a very large family it was fitting that I should be the first to go out into the world. I was not needed at home, for though scarcely to be accounted really wealthy, we were in those days quite well off financially. There was an adequate staff of servants; a nurse for the little ones; a German governess, who with exasperated affection wrestled with a schoolroom full of naughty but amusing children; and my mother's excellent management of household affairs left none but the kind of tasks I called "holding the pins" for a grown-up daughter to fulfil.

My sister Dora died when I was sixteen, and after her death two or three years of unsatisfactory drifting with no real employment for me followed. I learnt a little Latin (since absolutely forgotten) from a shy old Oxford don who was a bad teacher; read in a desultory fashion everything I could lay my hands on, and acquired the only foreign language I ever spoke fluently from the first two German governesses engaged for the schoolroom children.

They were sisters, each of whom stayed a year with us, and as both were only in the early twenties, they were not too old to be companionable to me at sixteen and later.

It was when the second of these German sisters left that I made up my mind to study for a profession that would give me some real work to do.

I was tired of an aimless life certainly, but I think the driving force, after all, was the *Zeitgeist*: a longing to be "in the movement." I wanted to find my way

into the world of new ideas; to meet writers, artists of all kinds, and, curiously enough (since in those days of all narrow lives that of a teacher was the narrowest), the profession I adopted *did* eventually lead me to the kind of life I desired. The path I followed, all unconscious of its direction, reminds me of that road of Chesterton's poem which, made by the "rolling English drunkard," arrives by devious ways at a totally unexpected destination:

"The night we went to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head."

you remember?

I little thought that in working for the "Higher Local" examination with intent to become a teacher I was taking the first step to becoming a novelist. But so it was.

Though my parents put no obstacles in my way when I announced my intention of teaching in one of the Girls' Public Day Schools, innocent of academic taint as they were, they could not help me as to procedure. This I had to discover for myself.

Correspondence with an old schoolfellow revealed that a degree taken at Girton or Newnham was the best passport to the profession of teaching, but that the Cambridge Higher Local Certificate would do. No doubt if I had urged it, my always generous father would have sent me to College. But I didn't want to go. I knew that an academic life was not for me.

A study of the syllabus for the Cambridge Higher Local showed me that it was possible, even advisable, to take three years over gaining the full certificate. This did not suit my impatience at all, so tackling the work with fury, and without any coaching, I crammed into one year all the subjects set for a three years' course, and to my amazement got honours in Literature and

History. Believing myself at last at the end of the work of preparation, I found to my dismay that *training* was considered necessary. Teachers now had to be taught how to teach. And certainly it was time! It was then that, thanks to Miss Buss's letter to my father, I speedily found myself at the Training College for Women Teachers at Cambridge.

COLLEGE

Once again it is necessary to mention a comparatively early novel of mine.

In *The God of Chance*, life at the C.T.C., as its students called and still call it, is as fully described as my school-days in *The Victorians*, and though the heroine is a purely fictitious character whose parentage and social circumstances bear no resemblance to my own, she reflects my reaction to the novelty of college life.

In "Miss Middleton" I have drawn what is on the whole a faithful portrait of Miss Hughes, the first Principal of a "College" which, when I knew it, consisted of a row of poor little houses on the outskirts of Cambridge, with a "Tin Tabernacle," as we called the newly built lecture hall of corrugated iron, attached.

Later, in the lifetime of Miss Hughes, and still under her governance, a more worthy building arose in that part of Cambridge called Parker's Piece. But I am glad to have known the College in its early days and in its homely, not to say poverty-stricken, setting.

Despite my hurried preparations and departure from home, the term was a week old when late one evening I arrived, and on entering the dining-room beheld with consternation my twenty fellow-students at the supper table.

Nowadays most College girls either training for some profession or merely taking the academic course are as well dressed and careful of their appearance as

any of their unscholastic sisters. In my young day, as pioneers, they tended either to despise the art of making themselves attractive, or never to have learnt it. They were clothed, not *dressed*, and my first impressions of the C.T.C. students was, to say the least of it, so unfavourable that on regaining my own room after supper I sank on to the bed with a half-formed resolution to leave the place next morning!

Little more than a fortnight previously, while I was visiting a London friend, at that very hour I had been at a dance. Tearfully I conjured up the vision of a shining floor, gay music, pretty dresses, and contrasted the scene with the room I had just left, and its dowdy occupants. Their sole idea of amusement, as I contemptuously told myself, seemed to be the "making of academic jokes" which I never should and didn't *want* to understand!

In thus arrogantly summing up girls and women, many of whom were more worthy of the respect than of the contempt of an ignorant girl, I was good enough to except the Principal, Miss Hughes. Though her charming face was as ill-served by the clumsy dress she wore as that of any of her students, she had at first sight enchanted me, and before I slept, common sense re-asserting itself, I abandoned the idea of leaving the place forthwith. A week or two later, when I had settled down, and to my surprise found myself enjoying the life, I laughed at my own idiocy.

It was a pleasant change for one thing, now that I was again in a scholastic atmosphere, to be a favourite with the Principal instead of the black sheep I had been in the eyes of Miss Buss. This agreeable state of things was rather precariously achieved, however, and, but for a fortunate accident, might have meant a precipitate departure from the College on my part after all.

In my dislike of the outward appearance of the students I failed to realize that, though for a different reason, they looked askance at mine, and that this mistrust was shared by Miss Hughes herself. The discovery that here "fashionable" clothes presupposed in the wearer lack of brains and general futility of outlook, I made by a mere chance.

In company with one or two of my new acquaintances I was on my way to a lecture a day or two after my arrival, and Miss Hughes, talking to a friend, was walking not far behind. My ears were quick, and the voice of our Principal had a peculiar carrying quality.

"What do you think of our new fashionable student?" I heard her ask her companion. "*She's* not likely to be any good, I'm afraid!"

That evening, still furiously angry, but luckily composed, I knocked at her study door, and bidden to enter, found her writing by the fire.

"I've come to tell you," I began, "that I heard what you said about me this afternoon, and I think it was most unfair. . . . It would interest me to know why you think that a girl who wears a pretty hat is less likely to have brains than one who puts a decayed cabbage leaf on her head?"

Great cheek this, from a student to a Principal, of course! But as at half a minute's notice I was more than ready to pack up and leave a place I was going to hate, I didn't care how she took it. And she took it beautifully! She apologized, laughed at the cabbage leaf, admitted that her remark was grossly unfair, because as yet she knew nothing about me, and ended by saying, with her delightful smile, "I'm glad you've come. I think you will be very good for many of us."

My devotion to her dated from that moment, and though I saw little of her after my College course was

over, and living in Italy at the time, did not hear of her death for fully a year after it happened, I still think of her with affection.

When I knew her she was young (very little over thirty), pretty, gay, and amusing, as well as an excellent lecturer and critic. That without undue conceit I may claim to have made a success of my brief career as a "professional" teacher I owe largely to what I learnt from her at the College to which she devoted her life.

The course at Cambridge was too short to make any lasting friendships very probable, and I soon lost touch with the students of my year. But as a type new to me, one girl with her precise diction, her dry sense of humour, her love of the beauty and luxury of which her own life was destitute, greatly attracted me. I used to listen with special interest to her talk of a certain young man at the School of Mines, with whom she corresponded. His name, she told me, was *Wells*, and she believed he would eventually make a successful writer.

He has justified that belief! When not long ago I read the Autobiography of H. G. Wells I was thrilled to find that he had been greatly helped in the reconstruction of his early life by the letters he had written to "Elizabeth Healey" (presumably lent to him by the "Lizzie" I remember), who now, if she still lives, bears a name unknown to me.

Years ago, from "H.G." himself, I heard that she had married a Professor, who, if my memory of what he told me serves, was one of her father's friends.

I was present at the dinner given at the Savoy in honour of the seventieth birthday of H. G. Wells, and my mind going back to the novel I called *The God of Chance*, with its mingling of fact and fiction, I wondered whether, if "Katherine Hillier" (Lizzie

Healey of the C.T.C.) should chance to be among the five hundred guests in that ballroom at the Savoy, we should recognize one another.

The same novel faithfully recounts my own bewilderment when confronted with the course of study at the Training College. At first I was horribly at sea, for owing to my very sketchy education most of the subjects were new to me. I had, for instance, never heard of psychology, and had hitherto innocently supposed my eyes to be two windows through which I surveyed the world outside myself. Awestruck I listened to those students who had taken their degree at Girton or Newnham talking learnedly on matters beyond my comprehension. A few of them, having already taught for some time, were no longer in their first youth, and were devoting a year to the attainment of a certificate to ensure the continuance of the none too generous salary allotted to teachers.

But most of us were very young, and I was not the only one to be startled by strange new subjects.

"They talk about *precepts* in something they call psychology," observed a puzzled young thing to me a few days after my arrival. "Or perhaps it's *percepts*?" she added vaguely. "I don't know what this psychology is all about! And you spell it with a 'p,' not an 's.' Psychology, I mean."

I don't think she ever knew "what it was all about." But I soon began to be fascinated by the very little that in a year's course, which included many other subjects, I was able to learn about the human mind.

Duly chaperoned, because of the sprinkling of male undergraduates in the room, we attended a course of lectures on psychology, delivered by Professor Ward at the Divinity School, but most of the other lectures, dealing with the Theory and Practice of Education,

were given in the Tin Tabernacle, either by Miss Hughes or by visiting women lecturers.

The practical side of the training was a horrible ordeal, for it involved giving a lesson to a class of thirty or forty children in one of the elementary schools of the town, and next day listening to a criticism from the five or six students, complete with note-books, who had to be present at, and later give their opinion of, that lesson. Miss Hughes herself summed up its merits, if any. Not before she had dealt very faithfully with the victim, though!

It was a valuable if chastening experience, for every aspect of the performance was considered, including voice and manner—two important attributes to successful teaching.

But in spite of these alarming incidents, I was very happy at the C.T.C. I loved my tiny bed-sitting-room, and since, of course, in cold weather there was a fire in it, for the first time in my life in winter I went to bed warm. (There were no bedroom gas or coal fires in my youth!) None, at any rate, for the young and healthy. I was delighted also with my bureau, at which I read or wrote, often till very late at night. We all worked hard, for there was much reading to be done in a short time. But I managed to get a great deal of fun out of the life, in spite of its strenuousness.

With the students (except a few who, resenting the undeniable fact that "Miss Hughes made favourites," were inclined to transfer their displeasure to me as one of them) I was on very friendly terms. Some of them I taught to dance, and there were evenings when the Tin Tabernacle served gayer purposes than that of a lecture-room. The cocoa parties in one another's rooms were sometimes amusing enough also. They did not begin till after ten o'clock at night, so dressing-

gowns were always worn, and their bright colours, even though the material was of flannel, so transformed some of the girls that they looked as pretty and attractive as young things ought to look.

As a background to the whole business of work and play, the beauty of Cambridge itself dwells in my mind as a permanent treasure.

Services in the lovely chapel of King's haunt my memory to this day, with the delight they offered to eye and ear, and mingled with the æsthetic memories. I recall the amusement I used to get from watching the entrance of the Newnhamites on Sunday morning. The style of dress of studious women in those days was another though very different spectacle I should have been sorry to miss!

I shall never forget, either, my first sight of the towers and grey walls of the Colleges seen through the leaf-spangled spreading trees of the "Backs." Very vividly also my "inward eye" beholds the sheets of fringed, blue anemones (flowers I had never seen before) on the lawns in the foreground of as lovely a picture as any, England, so rich in beauty of all kinds, affords. In my day the then compulsory cap and gown of the undergraduates, who singly or in groups strolled about the town or the College precincts, greatly enhanced the mediæval aspect of the city.

But except for one flying visit to the new C.T.C. building, I have never, since my College days, set foot in Cambridge; and a recent Saturday afternoon visit to Oxford, a city I also knew well years ago, caused me to vow never to do so. There are some memories it is not wise to disturb.

CHAPTER III

A VISIT

I THINK it was a few months before my Training College course began that I went for the first time to stay with the Grant Allens.

Though our respective families were connected by marriage, I had seen them only once before, and then I was still a child.

Grant Allen was a well-known literary figure in those days, and my excitement at being invited to his home was only equalled by shyness at the prospect.

Even then, though I had committed myself to a life of teaching, in my secret heart I cherished a mad hope that one day I should write, and to meet a distinguished author seemed to me, however foolishly, a step in the direction of my desire. But I was right. It was.

At that time the Grant Allens were living in a charming little house at Dorking called *The Nook*, and an hour or two after my arrival I felt completely at home with them. Nellie Allen, a pretty woman of thirty, had a delightfully easy manner, and her husband, ten or twelve years older, tall, thin, long-faced, and occasionally, at least to me, disconcerting, had gained the well-merited reputation among his many literary friends of being an excellent conversationalist.

During my first evening I learnt that I had just missed Robert Louis Stevenson, who had been their guest and had only that morning left them. As I had a passionate admiration for Stevenson, the next best thing to seeing him was to hear him discussed. But

what seemed chiefly to have impressed his host and hostess about him was his physical appearance. "You have only to look at his lank, damp hair to know he's a very sick man," Grant said.

Swinburne, too, had recently stayed with them for a day or two and had made a great pet of their only child, a boy of six or seven.

I listened entranced to talk about writers who were only shining names to me, and with scarcely less interest to what the Allens said of Italy, and chiefly of Florence, a city I longed to see, little dreaming that I should one day know it as well and love it as devotedly as they did.

I think it was on this first visit to them that York Powell and Edward Clodd came to lunch one day, and the talk begun at the luncheon table went on for hours in the drawing-room later.

I had never before heard really good conversation. At home, in a house that swarmed with lively children, there would have been little opportunity for it, even if it had been desired. But the love of conversation is evidently a rare taste, for few people—even intelligent people—care for talk in the sense of the word. My own predilection for it has never been thoroughly gratified, and I sometimes think I managed very badly in not arranging to be born in the age of the *salon*!

It is, I hope, unnecessary to observe that at least on the occasion of my first visit to a literary household I was merely an absorbed listener to conversation that made me realize how abysmally ignorant I was of life and letters!

One of Henry Harland's probably forgotten but graceful short stories ends with the words, "Most things come too late. There are some that come too early."

Certainly this is true of my two meetings with, or rather glimpses of, George Meredith.

It was on this same first visit of mine that we drove to his cottage on Box Hill. He had been very ill, but was now able to see a few friends.

I was left in the carriage at the garden gate while the Allens went into the house, thinking that three visitors at a time might be forbidden. But in a few minutes Grant returned for me.

"He wants you to come in," he said, "and I should like you to see him because this may be your last chance. I don't think he's going to live." (There were many years of life for George Meredith after that summer day.)

As yet I had read none of his novels, but I knew he was considered a great writer, and I was delighted at the summons.

I remember a small room on the entrance floor, very simply furnished, and, in spite of his frail appearance, the most romantically handsome man I had ever seen, leaning back in an arm-chair. He wore a coat of brown velvet, and there was a large plaid shawl folded over his knees.

He gave me a smile, and in a weak voice a word or two of greeting, as I shook hands, and almost immediately Nellie Allen rose to go.

That evening Grant talked a great deal about Meredith's work.

"Read *Richard Feverel* when you are five-and-twenty," he said. "You will appreciate it better then."

As I should have had five years to wait by taking his advice, it is not surprising that by the following summer, when I saw Meredith again, I should have read nearly all he had so far written.

This time he was perfectly well, and looked hand-

somer and more romantic than ever when he walked into the drawing-room at "The Nook."

As I was being re-introduced I said, "I have met you before, Mr. Meredith. But a long time ago. A year ago!"

He turned to Grant Allen, smiling.

"Isn't it charming and wonderful to meet anyone young enough to think a year 'a long time ago'?"

This, while he stood waiting till I was seated in the chair he was offering with as great a show of deference as he might have extended to a princess; and by no means accustomed to be treated as a great lady, I was thankful when entering at once into conversation with my elders, he gave me the opportunity to recover from the unusual experience.

The "grand manner" and the elaborate phrasing which characterize his novels seemed to be natural to him. At all events he employed it in conversation, for in describing a beautiful woman of his acquaintance I recall some such expressions as, "Eyes dark and profound. Hands exquisite. Mouth—*arc de cupidon!*" with a gesture expressive of rapture at the memory of the lady.

I forget to whom the apt criticism that Meredith put all his phrases into curl papers is attributed, but some years later, when the cult for his novels was at its height, I remember quoting it to a friend while we argued as to whether they would live. She felt sure they would, because they were as "exhilarating as champagne." There is some truth in this; but when one has to take the sparkling draught from such an elaborately twisted glass I doubt whether the vintage will "keep." Certainly the young people of to-day don't read George Meredith. For them he is a "back number"; and though I don't regard their verdict on him as on many

other writers as the last word in criticism, the world and people of Meredith's creation are so alien not only from the world and the people of to-day (and if one may judge from the trend of things) from what they are likely to be to-morrow, that I doubt whether his novels will be remembered. But as a *poet* surely he will not die.

I remember how Grant Allen used to stride about the room repeating some of the lines from his poems. "*Bulls that walk the pastures with kingly flashing hides*"—beating out the metre in the strongly accented way in which he read poetry. It was a curious way, one I never knew whether I liked or *disliked*.

But no matter how time deals with them, I am glad to have seen and talked with the two great novelists of the Victorian age, Meredith and Hardy, though in regard to myself, I could wish the respective ages I had attained when I met them had been reversed.

At twenty it would have been easier for me to talk to the simpler-mannered Thomas Hardy than to Meredith. Years later, no longer shy, and not quite so ignorant, I should have enjoyed the society of George Meredith. But that's the way things happen in this too often exasperating life!

My friendship with the Grant Allens lasted many years.

Soon after I knew them they moved to Hindhead, then unspoilt by over-building, and wonderfully beautiful. I often stayed there, and Grant's conversation did much to accelerate in me, while I was still very young, the process of growing up.

He held what were then considered shockingly advanced views on most subjects, but it was the frankness of his talk about sex that for some time I found

disconcerting and terribly embarrassing. I am quite aware that nowadays damsels of eighteen listen to and take part in the kind of discussions I heard at the Grant Allens, and though I think sex was something of an obsession with Grant, if they are serious discussions, so much the better. The hush! hush! epoch is fortunately over. But much of the talk was strong meat for a country girl whose life had run on very simple lines in a family where the very word *sex* was never so much as mentioned—not, I think, from prudery, but because in ordinary society it was not a topic for discussion in public.

Grant Allen had a certain vogue as a novelist when I was young, and one of his novels, *The Woman Who Did*, aroused much criticism and gave him a place among the so-called “advanced” writers of the ‘nineties. To-day “bread and milk” as a description of it would be considered too strong!

But the part of his work he took most seriously was the popularizing of the then comparatively new doctrine of evolution, and since most of the advanced scientists regarded the Universe as entirely mechanistic, Grant Allen himself was a professed atheist.

I will not pretend that he robbed me of any very cherished religious beliefs, for though mine was the conventional upbringing which as a matter of course included acceptance of the Christian doctrine, “religion” was not a matter of vital importance to me. Though I am no longer a materialist, I cannot agree with what Sheila Kaye Smith in her interesting book, *Three Ways Home*, asserts as to the natural existence of religious feeling in children. The religious temperament has always seemed to me as much of a special gift as the artistic or mathematical one, and it has not been vouchsafed to me.

But grateful though I am to Grant Allen for much

that I learnt from him, it was a pity, though perhaps almost inevitable, that I should have been so long dominated by his materialistic views. He was the first very clever man I had met, and also the last I was to meet for many years, and I accepted all his opinions and beliefs—or lack of them—unquestioningly. Many of the former were well worth acceptance, as I think, in spite of its pessimism, the little poem he calls *A Prayer* proves.

I copy it from a slim volume of his verse which he gave me many years ago:

“A crowned Caprice is God of this world,
On his stony breast are his white wings furled,
No ear to listen, no eye to see,
No heart to feel for a man hath he.

But his pitiless arm is swift to smite;
And his mute lips utter one word of might,
Mid the clash of gentler souls and rougher,
‘Wrong must thou do, or wrong must suffer.’

Then grant, oh dumb blind god, at least that we
Rather the sufferers than the doers be.”

He was a gentle-natured man, deeply moved by the suffering and injustice in the world, and as a great upholder of freedom in every aspect of life, he wanted to see it extended to the relationship between the sexes, long before such freedom as now exists was considered even a possibility. He should be satisfied if he could have lived till to-day—and possibly a little startled at some of its results!

My talk about the Training College used to interest and amuse him, though he deplored the strict rules which made acquaintance with the undergraduates impossible. At the time, this to me was no grievance. It took me long to grow up, and because except at dances I met very few young men, I thought of them

merely as dancing partners. The men I might have known, had my brothers been old enough to have friends of the appropriate age for me, did not come my way, and for longer than is usual among normal girls I didn't trouble much about them.

It was on one of my early visits to Hindhead that I first met the strange, amusing woman long afterwards known to most of her friends as "Grannie" Steevens.

She had not then made her "amazing" but most happy marriage with George Steevens, later the well-known newspaper correspondent in the Boer War.

When I met her she was a widow, and for some years she had looked after and brought up a number of children taken from poor homes. Several of the boys, when they were old enough, entered her service as men-servants, and to those ignorant of this circumstance her treatment of them, by turns scolding and caressing, was startling enough.

I vaguely remember the house to which we went one Sunday afternoon. It belonged, I believe, to Conan Doyle, and may have been rented by "Grannie" (to employ prematurely her subsequent name) as a holiday home for the children. Though there were already a number of her friends who had been asked to supper strolling about in the garden, we—the Grant Allens and I—were immediately also invited, and eventually a large party assembled at the supper table. Before this I was taken to bedrooms where the children who were going to bed hailed the appearance of their guardian with shouts of delight, and when "Grannie" chased them about the room, pretending to beat them, pandemonium set in.

At supper we were waited on by two young footmen, and to my amazement, when one of them passed the

wrong dish, or in some other way annoyed her, "Grannie" shouted at him, "*Damn you, boy! What a fool you are!*" A moment later, as he passed her, she patted his hand. "Good boy, Charles! I didn't mean it," she penitently exclaimed.

I had never heard a woman swear before, and what with one thing and another, I felt I was seeing life!

Some days afterwards, our eccentric hostess of Sunday night came to call on the Grant Allens. For some reason which I forget, she found me alone, and putting her arm into mine, she remarked, "I like you, my dear, so I'm going to tell you something that has happened."

Then, as we strolled about the garden she told me that a year previously a man young enough to be her son had asked her to marry him. She had laughed and told him that if he came back and made the same request a year from that day she would think about it.

"Of course I never expected to see the child again. But a little while ago, on the anniversary of his proposal, he came—and I think perhaps I shall marry him," she concluded.

She did, and I afterwards heard many stories from people who knew them well of the happy ten years they spent together, and of their lavish entertainment of their friends before the death of George Steevens. But after those two meetings with her at Hindhead when I was a young girl, I did not see "Grannie" again till many years later, when I met her at a house-party in a villa on Lake Como. Then, though as lively, amusing, and eccentric as ever, in age at least she was quite an old woman. She told me that on her seventieth birthday she had received an offer of marriage. I dare say it was true!

To return for a moment to my very first visit to the Grant Allens. There was one occasion, and one only,

when for about two minutes I longed for the presence of Miss Buss!

I had been telling Grant of her insistence that I could understand Euclid if I pleased.

"You have been badly taught," he declared. "In ten minutes I could make an intelligent girl like you understand a simple proposition."

He tried. After a quarter of an hour he threw down his pencil, laughing.

"I give it up!" he said. "You have a blind spot there."

It is only one of many, alas! and in order to avoid an inferiority complex, which would be worse than any number of "blind spots," I am often driven with deliberate conceit to concentrate upon the things I *can* do well.

CHAPTER IV

THE SWANSEA HIGH SCHOOL

MY course at the Cambridge Training College over, and the certificate to prove me a qualified teacher gained, the next step was to find a school in which to demonstrate the fact. My hope that it would be in London was not to be gratified, and it was only after some months of waiting that I was appointed "English mistress" in the newly opened High School at Swansea.

Swansea seemed like exile, and I took the long journey with a heavy heart, certain that I should hate the place and all that therein was.

The God of Chance again faithfully reflects my state of mind during the first term. Except for the hours at the school, where I soon found I liked teaching, I was desperately lonely and unhappy. Never having been in lodgings before, I was afraid to ask anything of my not very pleasant landlady beyond the routine service, and I remember shivering in the parlour where I sat correcting exercise books all the evening, because I hesitated to ring for more coal to replenish the fire.

At all times in Wales it rains a great deal, but during that autumn term it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that it never stopped, and as I listened to it drumming upon the window-pane, and heard the wind howling round the house, sitting alone in that ugly parlour, life seemed a wretched enough affair to me.

How often then I recalled words spoken by the most charming of headmistresses, Miss Connolly, of the Aske's Grammar School at Hatcham. I had been sent to her just before I left the Training College by Miss

Hughes, who had heard that in her school there would shortly be a vacancy for a teacher.

Miss Connolly, up at Cambridge for some conference, had taken rooms in the town, and I went to her lodgings for an interview. At first sight she so attracted me that I was bitterly disappointed to find mine were not the right subjects for the post to become vacant.

"You will have to live in lodgings, I suppose, wherever you go?" she asked, after this had been made clear.

"Oh, yes! That will be fun!" I replied.

She looked at me, smiled, and then sighed. I know I was absurdly young in appearance.

"Poor child!" she said softly, after a pause.

At the time I thought the pity in voice and words misplaced. It no longer seemed so when I sat alone, listening to the wind and rain in that miserable Swansea parlour!

I have never forgotten Miss Connolly. She has always seemed to me a shining exception to the type of headmistress then and, so far as I am aware, still in existence. She looked, and was, a woman of the world, "comfortable," kindly, humorous. Two friends of mine who for years taught in the Aske School always refer to her as "Dear Madam," and that alone speaks volumes.

It is long since I had any experience of the heads of large public schools, and the type has probably improved. But in my day they tended to be either violent-tempered autocrats or "desiccated virgins," ignorant of life, however versed in letters—the kind of women to whom a "love-affair" would have been a god-send for their pupils' sake if not for their own!

The headmistress at Swansea, for instance, though just in her dealings, and equable in temper, was a purely academic product, and knew no other aspect of life. A scholarship gained at a High School had taken her

to Girton, whence she returned to rule another High School. "*From a school to a school. Dust to dust. Ashes to ashes,*" as "Katherine Hillier" sums up the fate of most teachers in *The God of Chance*.

Wretched as that first term was for me, I liked my work, I liked the children, the two other teachers, and even the school building which, till recently a private house, had little of the academic atmosphere I so detested about it. Spacious if architecturally ugly, it stood in a large garden full, in my time, of flowering shrubs. In summer the white stars of jessamine wreathed the windows of my class-room, and from the platform from which I looked down on forty children I could see over their heads grass, trees, and a streak of silver sea.

My loneliness was not of very long duration, for the school increased so rapidly in numbers that more teachers became necessary, and with one of the newcomers who arrived at the beginning of the spring term I arranged to take rooms. The other two girls, Nancy Handy and Chris Barnard, were already together in a house not too far from our new lodgings, and throughout my two years at Swansea we remained a most satisfactory quartet. My friendship with my own partner, Emmie Wise, was broken only at her death three years ago.

I think we must have been for some time the youngest staff on any of the High Schools in England or Wales! Even the headmistress was considerably under thirty, and the eldest of the assistant mistresses was still in the early twenties. We were young and light-hearted enough to get enjoyment out of the undoubtedly dull and monotonous life forced upon teachers, especially if they happened to live in as small a place as Swansea, which, like most provincial towns, was full of gossip-mongers. In *The God of Chance* I took care to place "Katherine

Hillier" in London, so that she could occupy her free time as she pleased without fear of some busybody connected with the school discovering that her friends were of both sexes. Nowadays, even in a provincial town, I suppose, teachers are more or less free, though that the scholastic profession will be the last stronghold of prudery, I am convinced!

This would seem to be the moment to make reservations concerning the freedom I claimed to have enjoyed in my youth. It was not attained till I began to live in London and adopted another profession. Elsewhere teachers led, and were expected to lead, cloistered lives, and except for a "How do you do?" and a handshake from the father of some child who had asked me to tea, once and once only during my two years at Swansea did I speak to a man!

But on that occasion I spent a whole morning with one who was a perfect stranger to me!

The day after my arrival was Sunday, and with long hours before me in a strange town I wandered out after breakfast to find "the Park," vaguely mentioned by my landlady when I asked where to go for a walk.

Meeting at the end of the road a well-dressed man who to me was a "kind-looking old gentleman" and was probably about forty-five, I asked the way.

"Well, I'm going there," he said, "so if you'll come with me——"

Nowadays a girl of twenty-one not deliberately out for adventure would have known better than to address a stranger, however kind and old-gentlemanly his aspect. But I was then about as experienced in the ways of the world as a child of ten. Fortunately for me the man was "decent" and evidently amused, for on taking leave of me some hours later at a point in the road far enough from the house to be discreet, his eyes twinkled

as he said "Good-bye." With a rather broad smile as he held my hand a little longer than was necessary, he added, "Don't let them spoil you!"

For, of course, I had chattered to him about the school in which on the morrow I was to begin to teach; about living for the first time alone in lodgings, and altogether given myself away in a fashion very useful to a man whose intentions might have been strictly dishonourable! I never saw him again (he had told me he was only passing through the town), and luckily for me, as I was not yet known by sight to any of the local gossips, I escaped unpleasant consequences. Absurd as it sounds to-day, these might have been serious, as I was to learn later by the fate of a prospective science teacher for the new rapidly growing school. A girl who, like me, had arrived on a Saturday in order to begin work on Monday morning, had brought her bicycle, and a report that she had been seen riding it (presumably on Sunday) was carried to the headmistress. We never saw that girl!

A year or two later women everywhere were riding bicycles, but this pioneer, whoever she may have been, was not considered fit to enter a respectable establishment like the Swansea High School. So it was probably lucky for me that when the young man who for a week or two took the rooms below mine cast a favourable eye upon me, chance prevented me from making his acquaintance.

I was sitting in my dressing-gown by the fire to get warm before going to bed one evening when the landlady rushed in with a big bunch of chrysanthemums.

"The gentleman downstairs says will you accept of these!" she said, the prospect of romance making her unusually affable. "And he says may he come up? He'd so much like to make your acquaintance. Oh!

now, *don't* disappoint 'im, miss! He's 'alf way upstairs already. . . . *He* won't mind your dressing-gown!"

She was probably right as to that, but even *I* knew that to meet a young man for the first or any other time unconventionally clothed would be considered "fast behaviour," and what was more important, that the woman would gossip. So I sent a message of thanks for the flowers, and said as I was tired I hoped he'd forgive me for not asking him in.

My landlady's annoyance—he was "such a nice young gentleman"—probably coloured the tone of my refusal, for the nice young gentleman made no further advances, and soon after left the house altogether. A pity! He was rather a good-looking boy, though I'm sure not worth the quite possible loss of my job if I'd been seen about with him.

The rooms the new teacher, Emmie Wise, and I took were high up on one of the terraces at the back of the town, from which there was a beautiful view. We looked over roofs sloping at different levels on to the bay, with a spur of one of the Welsh hills running out into the sea. Fortunately too far off to be visible as more than a blur at the foot of it, lay the dreadful little town of Landore. A cloud of smoke from the copper-smelting that was its industry hung above it. Not a blade of grass could grow under the blighting pall of that smoke; and I have never forgotten the hideousness of the rows and rows of dreary houses where the miners lived, for on journeys to and from Swansea they were visible from the train.

Close to our lodgings grew a tall and beautiful poplar tree, and I cannot think of our little parlour without hearing *its rainy-sounding silver leaves* accompanying the talk and laughter of our quartet on Saturday evenings in summer-time, when we sat in the twilight at the open window.

THE SHELTERING TREE

Perhaps we had returned from a long afternoon on the sands of one or other of the lovely little bays along the coast, then unspoilt by building—Langland, or the charmingly named Bracelet Bay, where there were caves and stretches of shining sand and no other sound than the murmur of the sea and the cry of the seagulls. Or we might even have been as far as the peninsula of Gower, remote and lonely, where in the spring wild daffodils grew, and one seemed very far from the boring business of marks and class registers, and all the red tape that to me spoilt the pleasure of teaching.

But those were the comparatively easy, leisurely days of the school before the work so increased that those who stayed there much longer than I found little leisure for these delights.

In the winter we met at one another's rooms on Saturday evenings, and in return for getting the mending I detested done for me by one or other of the three girls, I read poetry to them, or sometimes one of the then much-discussed plays of Ibsen. The fierce arguments arising out of these plays were generally between Nancy Handy and me.

Nancy was a lively Irish girl with an infectious laugh which used to leave her convulsed and weak with merriment when anything amused her. And how often then we were all amused! I don't think I have ever laughed quite so much since the days of that Swansea quartet.

As I mention Nancy Handy I think of a strange example of that coincidence which in a novel is nearly always so unconvincing, and in life occurs so frequently.

A year or two before we met she had been to Germany for a few months as paying guest in a family. In talking of this visit one day she said how surprised she had been to hear the numerous dogs and cats in the house called by English names, till the eldest daughter explained

that the animals were named after the children in an English family where she had been governess.

They were the names of my sisters and brothers! So out of all the thousands of other German families to any one of which chance might have led her, this girl from Ireland, of whose existence till we met at Swansea I was ignorant, had known the very two sisters who had lived with us!

The discovery naturally led us to talk of Germany, and we agreed that the standard of living there, at the time, was at least fifty years behind that to which we were accustomed in England.

During the idle years I spent after leaving the "North London" I had been for three months to Leipzig, boarding in a school recommended by some acquaintances of ours who had been educated there. Though I then spoke German fluently, it was in parrot-fashion, and I thought I might as well learn the language properly. The headmistress was an educationalist well known in Germany, and I expected to find a house at least comparable with Myra Lodge, where, as the physical amenities of life were then understood, there was little to complain of. I was soon disillusioned!

Spoilt in material ways at home though I was, I might have borne with the bare, poverty-stricken look of the rooms, the bad food, the wretched bedroom accommodation, even, by going to the Public Baths in the town, with the lack of facilities for washing—if the place had been clean.

It was not. It was horribly dirty, and except for a few happy days I look back upon that visit to Leipzig with distaste. It was not a success. In spite of her excellence as a teacher (I could and did attend any class I pleased), I didn't like the Principal, intellectually brilliant though she was; nor did she like me, for I'm afraid

I insufficiently disguised my dismay at what seemed to me the sordidness of life in her school.

Certainly there were compensations. I loved the picturesqueness of the town, and to this day vividly recall the beauty of the country I saw in those *Ausflüge* so rightly beloved by Germans.

Long walks through lovely forests, up hill and down dale, we took, with glimpses of a green and gold plain and tree-clad hills at intervals. Then a halt for a meal at some simple inn and on again, the girls singing as they walked, as no English schoolgirls ever sing.

I have never been to Germany since those far-off years, and no doubt the modern German schoolgirl is not allowed to be sentimental. I imagine that the *schwärmerei* then in full spate is now despised by the Nordic young thing of to-day, filled with the pride of race. Of course there is always the Führer upon whom to lavish admiration. But that, doubtless, is compulsory.

The girls at that Leipzig school of the past were silly enough to *schwärm* for *die Engländerin* in their midst, and once during the war (for a moment wondering how on earth I got them) I came across several book-markers made of perforated cardboard lined with ribbon, and inscribed in coloured silks with such phrases as "*Ich denke dein*," "*Wergiss mein nicht*," and thought sadly that the nice little German girls who presented me with those offerings—mature women by 1914—would now be hating *all* Engländerinnen! I hope that hatred is long since forgotten.

I don't know when I have been better pleased than to receive after the war a letter from one of the German sisters who had lived with us when I was seventeen, as full as ever of affectionate interest in our family. Long ago married, she wrote, "My girls laugh at me that I so love England and read English books." I was

glad it was only laughter, and possibly affectionate laughter, that she had to face for her loyalty to us.

But I fancy this is a digression? Wasn't I at the Swansea High School? Let me return to say a word or two about the working side of it which I seem to have forgotten.

It was there, if power to interest and hold the attention of girls proves aptitude for the profession, that I discovered myself to be a good teacher. Also, that in spite of my own very sketchy education, I really enjoyed teaching. A lesson in geography was none the worse because I learnt much of it for the first time myself the previous evening. Perhaps it was all the fresher for the circumstance! My desultory but extensive reading (made possible only because of several leisure years after leaving school) I discovered to be a great help in giving girls a wider outlook than they generally receive from mere "lessons." That is my answer to those who would censure me for taking paid work when I could have been supported at home, thereby leaving the post for some poor girl who had to make her own living. There is much to be said for that point of view, I own. On the other hand, good teachers are rare, and (I have already admitted my deliberate conceit about a few things)—I was one of them.

If good teaching is as important as I think it, I feel justified in having exercised my gift, and the advantage of not being *obliged* to continue in a profession unsuited to its practitioner is obvious.

How many teachers, as well as their victims, have suffered because, owing to poverty, they have been compelled to go on with work unsuited to them? Their name must be legion.

Unfortunately it is not the possession of knowledge but the ability so to manage children as to make it

possible to impart it well enough to interest them that matters, and I look upon this particular ability as due to a certain *knack* I possessed with them, rather than to any great firmness of character. I have seen women, intellectually and morally my superiors, helpless before the class of screaming and laughing little devils I had just left quiet as mice and looking as though butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. Except to give the lesson that happened to be on the time-table, I had done nothing at all in the way of discipline; I talked and they listened, asked them questions, and they answered, and that was all about it. After the first day, when I let nothing pass that could remotely resemble the process known as "trying it on," I never found any difficulty in keeping order in my classes. I pinned my faith to an axiom impressed upon us at the C.T.C., "*Stop the beginnings of disorder,*" and this once well and truly done, there was no more trouble.

I left the Swansea High School because my health for a time broke down. Perhaps the copper smoke from Landore accounted for the throat trouble from which, after a little nursing at home, I never suffered again. In many ways I was sorry to go. I regretted leaving work I liked, the friends I had made, and the many girls of whom I was fond, especially those in my own form. But I was getting restless, tired of exclusively feminine companionship, and, little as I knew how to manage it, anxious to find a wider world.

This desire had been recently accentuated by an event which filled me with excitement and hope for the future. A story, which I suppose I had written during one of the holidays and sent to Grant Allen to read, was passed on by him to Longmans, the publishers, accepted, paid for not ungenerously, and finally came

out in their Magazine. I was in the seventh heaven of delight (if only in after years one could recapture the thrill of seeing for the first time words one has written actually in print!) and my three special friends shared the excitement. We celebrated. I gave a supper-party at which between us we drank a bottle of execrable claret, ate jam tarts, and felt ourselves the gayest of dogs! I was very happy, and letters from home, full of parental pride, increased the joyfulness of my mood till I began to feel too ill to take pleasure even in the dream that my literary career had actually begun. At the end of that term I went home.

Of our quartet, it was my special friend Emmie Wise who stayed longest at Swansea, and I pause here to say something about a woman whose memory I cherish with affection and deep admiration. Never was there a better example than she offered of what can be made of a life of few material advantages, and though in defence of those she loved she could be incisive, possessed of a character originally too shy, gentle, and diffident to make success at all probable.

A friend of hers who knew her before I did called her "the White Violet," and it was as apt a description of her personal appearance as of her character. Very small, her pretty face had the pure whiteness of the little flower to which she was likened, and her nature's lack of self-assertion was another attribute recalling it. Yet she could hold a class of potentially naughty girls—and later of big noisy boys—in absolute control. The Swansea girls, though she was popular, stood, I think, a little in awe of her, probably because her quietude puzzled them. This may have been also the case years later in her life when during the war she taught classes of boys in a large and important Grammar School so successfully

THE SHELTERING TREE

that when the war was over she was asked by the headmaster to stay and continue her work. She did, and remained there till she retired a few years before her death.

It was necessary for her to work very hard at subjects in which she coached boys of seventeen and eighteen with splendid results, and well earned was their respect and gratitude as well as that of the headmaster.

We never lost touch with one another, and I have met no one who, as life went on, developed more wonderfully in mind and character than this friend of my girlhood.

“And some there be which have no memorial.”

I cannot let this be said of Emmie Wise while I live to write, however briefly and inadequately, her praise.

CHAPTER V

LONDON

NOT long ago, at a party, I met a distant cousin who had known me and my sisters as girls, but living in Paris had seen little of any of us for years.

"What pioneers you Syretts were!" she exclaimed, in course of conversation, and though I had never before given the subject much consideration, I suppose in a way she was right.

For while we were all still very young we had a flat in London and lived there without any of the chaperonage then considered by most parents necessary for their daughters. We made our own friends, gave our own parties, went to those at other people's houses, exactly as do girls of to-day. At the time, this state of things seemed to me perfectly natural, for we were accustomed to liberty.

It was not that my father and mother had theories about the advantage of freedom for girls. They had no theories about anything at all, thank goodness! They were just rather exceptionally simple-minded people who thought no evil.

It never occurred to them that we might not, as they would have put it, "behave properly," and the London flat was taken for us because it seemed, and certainly was, a less expensive and more sensible way of providing a home for girls who all wanted to be "doing something" than to find separate boarding places for one going to the Slade School, another to Bedford College, or for a third, myself, anxious to get a post in a London school. But looking back upon those early days in

London I remember that "the Syretts' flat" was regarded by some of our older friends as an amusing and perhaps slightly dangerous innovation.

By the time I left Swansea the children at home of school age two years previously were now more or less grown-up, and three of them had developed a gift for painting. It is strange that though in the older generation, and so far as I am aware in the family on either side, there had been no artist of any kind, there should be two writers and three painters among the ten children who lived to grow up, brought into the world by my mother. It seems as though the natural love of beauty possessed by my parents, and also by my grandfather, became *creative* for the first time in their descendants. My grandfather, who lived near us, and my father also, had a passion for flowers, and were both excellent gardeners. Almost as soon as we knew how to use a trowel our grandfather used to show us how to pot plants and take cuttings, and encouraged us to be specially interested in the growth of those we had ourselves started in life. In looking over the weekly letters he wrote to me while I was at school I find scarcely one without a mention of the climbing fuchsia he called mine. "*Your fuchsia is budding,*" or "*Your fuchsia is at the height of its beauty,*" he says.

It was indeed a lovely thing. From a small cutting planted by me in a pot when I was about eight years old, it was transferred to a bed of earth in his conservatory, where in time it reached the roof and spread half over one wall—a cascade of cream-and-pink blossom.

I pity children whose attention is never directed to the beauty of the world! We were constantly reminded of it by living with, or near, people who loved it. "Quick, there's such a beautiful rainbow!" "The stars are

wonderful to-night; come and look!" or possibly, as my grandfather bent over a flower, "See what a marvellous colour!"

We frequently heard exclamations such as these from our elders, and most of us responded eagerly to the injunction to "look" and "see." To my grandfather I owe my introduction to poetry, and though some of the poets he loved no longer appeal to me, they led me to others who even by the youngest "intellectual" may be ignored, but can scarcely be despised.

In my novel *Julian Carroll* I have drawn what is no doubt an idealized portrait of my grandfather, but in my memory the original lives as in many ways a remarkable man.

The first flat my father took for us was in Ashley Gardens. Later we moved to Morpeth Terrace, on the opposite side of Westminster Cathedral, which, when we came to London, was non-existent. It was built under our eyes. From the windows of Ashley Gardens we saw its initial stages, from those of Morpeth Terrace its completion; and throughout those years the noise of its building, which now would drive me mad, but then I scarcely noticed, during most of the daylight hours never ceased.

Five of us, all under five-and-twenty, knowing scarcely a soul in London, settled into the Ashley Gardens flat, fortunately a large one, and began our respective work.

Kate went to Bedford College, then in Baker Street, Mabel and Nell to Art Schools (Nell all unaware that the blocks of stone, the piles of brick which soon began to fill the Cathedral site, held any hint of connection with her future life!). The sister, since Dora's death, next to me was the housekeeper, and in spite of the gleam of hope which one accepted story had given me, I had

no idea of abandoning the profession for which I was trained. This time, of course, it was absolutely necessary to find a post in London, and I found it in the Polytechnic School for Girls, where now the large Polytechnic Institute stands in Langham Place.

It was a ramshackle, shabby, insanitary but roomy building, and the girls who filled it were drawn chiefly from the small shop-keeping class in the streets off Oxford Circus and the neighbourhood. I never discovered exactly to whom or to what educational body the school owed its existence, but I remember that the late Quintin Hogg had much to do with it.

The girls were a rougher, less refined set than any I had previously had to deal with, and this, with one exception, might be said also of the staff. That exception was Mabel Beardsley, sister of the young genius soon to be the most discussed artist in London!

Whenever I think of that school, especially of the so-called "dining-room," deep in the basement, lighted only by thick plates of glass let into the pavement above, whenever I recall its squalid ugliness, or indeed the whole lower middle-class atmosphere of the place, I am freshly astonished that it should have been the means of introducing me to the exotic "Beardsley set!"

Not that there was anything at all "exotic" about Mabel when I first met her. She was rather a big girl, with a good, erect figure. She held herself well, but she could scarcely be called pretty. Her hair was red, the kind of red usually described as "ginger," and she had a nice pink-and-white, slightly freckled complexion.

One thing about her that existed before the wonderful change in her mode of life, and I may add in her appearance, was the charming courtesy of her manner. It was extended to every one, including the not too refined girls in her class, though one of them,

with the discernment often possessed by children, made a remark to me about her that I have never forgotten. "*Miss Beardsley is awfully nice to us,*" she said. "*But you like to teach us, and she doesn't!*"

It was true. Mabel was teaching conscientiously and thoroughly indeed, but only because she had to earn a living somehow. She didn't like it, and it was fortunate for her that her brother's sudden rise to fame, less than a year after we met, gave her the very life for which she was suited.

But though I am thankful that my own teaching career (as a whole-time job) was short, while it lasted I *did* like it—even at the Polytechnic, where, compared with the Swansea High School, the surroundings were ugly and the girls of a less well-mannered class. But I was fond of them. Many were intelligent, and a few gentle-natured and touching in their eager response to any effort of mine to give them a few non-material interests.

I remember how, after reading to them Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, many would gladly give up their ten minutes' "play" at half-past eleven to look with delight at Sir Noël Paton's pictures illustrating the poem, which I had brought to show them.

A certain little episode in connection with one of the most responsive of them I have never forgotten. She was a shy, quiet girl of fourteen who had asked me to tea at her home, and I had promised to go some time in the following week. After morning school on the day arranged, she hung about till the room was empty, and then blushing, and almost in tears, came up to me.

"Miss Syrett," she began, in a low voice, "I oughtn't to have asked you. We keep a public-house, and—and you'd have to go through the bar. There's no other entrance, so——" She looked at me beseechingly, and

her gasp of relief when I said in a matter-of-fact tone, "Well, what of it, Florrie?" I have never forgotten.

At four o'clock she took me to a small public-house in a mean little street somewhere at the back of Langham Place, and through a bar with a sanded floor where men were drinking, smoking, and spitting. From it a staircase led to a room that reminded me of a farmhouse kitchen! It was scrupulously clean, and had a country air about it. The girl's mother was a fresh-faced, comfortable-looking woman, who might have been a farmer's wife, and when I saw a real country tea on the table—new-laid eggs, honeycomb, and plates of bread-and-butter—I was not surprised to hear that they were Devonshire folk who had not been long in London.

There were several children younger than the school-girl I knew, who sat down to tea with us, all tidily dressed, shy, but well-mannered. Later, the mother told me the trouble they were in about an order to close some of the smaller public-houses in the neighbourhood. Not that she liked her husband's business. "But it's our living, you see," she said, sighing. And then I heard that none of her children were ever allowed to go through the bar unaccompanied. A woman who came in to help with the housework met Florrie every day as she returned from school so that she should not go through the place alone. "She's getting a big girl, and some of the men are not good characters," her mother said.

I liked my hostess immensely. I never met more carefully brought up children, and I have often wondered what happened in later years to a charming family.

I think Mabel Beardsley had been in the school some little while before my arrival. We were soon on friendly

terms, and as she, too, lived near Victoria, I very often found her already in the omnibus bound for Langham Place which I also took somewhere on the route. It was called *The Royal Blue*, and its pair of horses used to lumber up and down a very much less crowded Bond Street than the motor omnibuses of to-day have to negotiate.

Mabel and I were both heartily disliked by two of the least attractive of the other mistresses—I because of the favouritism of the headmistress, who let me teach anything I pleased in my classes; Mabel because of what they called her “affectation.” Their animosity so much amused us by its undisguised rudeness that we used to plan in advance frivolous conversations by way of still further exasperating them when we met at lunch-time. The ruder they became the more elaborately courteous Mabel, till they danced with fury! A silly game, no doubt. But we were young enough to enjoy their reaction to it.

Soon after we met, Mabel asked me to tea one Saturday.

“I want you to see my brother’s drawings,” she said. “I think they will interest you.”

They did!

He and Mabel lived with their mother in one of the squares near Eccleston Bridge. It was not at that time, if memory serves, St. George’s Square, which later every one in what was then “the movement” came to know so well, but somewhere near it.

I was introduced to Mrs. Beardsley, a slim, young-looking woman I imagined to be a widow, but afterwards found to have a husband living from whom she was separated. The family was then very poor; Mrs. Beardsley, an accomplished musician, taught music, and both of her children were working, Mabel

with me at the "Polytechnic," and Aubrey as a clerk in the Guardian Life and Fire Assurance Company.

It was after we had finished tea that a door opened and a very slight, thin youth, with the most curious face I have ever seen, came in with a portfolio under his arm. No one in the art world as yet had heard of him, and I suppose I was one of the first people to see drawings afterwards famous.

He spoke very little, I remember, and presently, with a word to his mother about some appointment, went out, leaving the portfolio on the table.

I wished that one or other of my art-school sisters had been present to endorse my opinion that I had seen work of an amazing quality.

"I've been looking at the most wonderful drawings by a boy not yet twenty. I'm certain he'll be famous!" I exclaimed when I went home.

They were his early illustrations, or rather *decorations* for the Morte d'Arthur cycle of stories, when he was still—with a difference all his own—under the influence of Burne Jones.

Before the end of that year several of those drawings were reproduced in *The Studio*, accompanied by an enthusiastic article upon the work of the young artist by Joseph Pennell.

I suppose Aubrey owed his first introduction to some of the celebrities of the day in the realms of art and literature to Frederick Evans of Jones and Evans in Queen Street, Cheapside. It was a bookshop he frequented while he was a clerk in the Fire Assurance Company, and it was Frederick Evans who made him known to publishers, and through them to well-known writers.

Aubrey's success was phenomenal. Once launched, the "Beardsley cult" began to spread like wild-fire.

Publishers competed to give him commissions to illustrate, or rather decorate, books, for his black-and-white drawings were always "decorations," and "the Beardsley type," "the Beardsley Woman" became current phrases understood in even wider circles than those of the *intelligentsia*.

The fortunes of the family being thus so speedily elevated, and financially so greatly increased, it was not surprising that Mabel should thankfully leave uncongenial work at the Polytechnic School. She gave the necessary notice of departure, and the last term we were together there has always remained an amusing memory to me.

"What are you going to do when you leave?" I asked.

"Go on the stage, and become a society beauty, dear," she calmly and quite seriously replied. Privately I wondered how she would achieve the latter ambition. But she did. I had not then realized how, given a good foundation (and although not then pretty, she had many physical points in her favour), a very slight assistance from art, as well as pretty clothes, might transform an ordinary nice-looking girl into one deserving of higher praise. A few years later, when she had become slim and willowy in figure, when, with a very little touching up, hair that had been a trifle too pale a red was warm and glowing enough to justify admiration for her "Titian colouring," she was really beautiful. The framework of her face was always excellent. She had "good bones," and when, first youth past, her face grew thinner, these were more in evidence and made her hazel eyes look larger and more brilliant.

To return to her last term as a teacher. Very frequently, often two or three times a week, our not too assiduous headmistress, who had a room in a house opposite the school, used to send a message to say she

could not be over in time for prayers. As second mistress, it was my duty in her absence to read them, but as I hated the task, Mabel used to say, "Let me take prayers, dear. It gives me an opportunity to practise my stage walk and diction!" It was difficult to keep a grave face while she proceeded to do so, moving majestically up the long room, between the rows of standing girls, to the platform, where in a clear, histrionic voice she read the lesson for the day.

I cannot remember whether we left the school together, or even the reason for my leaving it at all, for in spite of having an occasional story accepted in some magazine, writing as a career still seemed a fantastic dream. But I know I was not sorry to go.

I am glad the place was pulled down, for I always felt there was a sinister atmosphere about it.

There was something strange, if not unwholesome, about its headmistress, who, as I heard, died a few years after I left. Though she quite flagrantly favoured me, I never liked the poor woman. She was kind and easy-going—too easy-going and negligent for her position—but she was certainly unhappy. My feeling towards her held more than a tinge of repulsion, and this, till Mabel gave me a reason for it, always puzzled and often worried me with a sense of ingratitude towards her. It was time I learnt something about what are known as "the facts of life"—even if the abnormal ones had to be included.

There had been more than one suicide in connection with the school, and for years after I left it I kept in touch with and vainly tried to help one of the girls who had been in my class and was wrecking her life through drug-taking and other pernicious habits.

By the time we had been in town a year my sisters

had made many friends among the art students they met, though it was characteristic of the family that *slovenly* Bohemia never attracted any of us. We had lived in a carefully ordered home, and dirty studios, inhabited by students none too particular about the care of the person, we all held in abhorrence.

I knew my sisters' friends as a matter of course—one of them was Ethel Walker, who of recent years has come into her own, and is rightly hailed as a great artist. Very many years older than my Slade School sister, Nell, she was always fond of her, and liked and admired her work.

But though as art students my sisters had greater opportunities at first than I, my continued acquaintance with the Beardsley family soon brought me many friends of my own. Aubrey's lightning-swift fame drew most of the painters and writers of the day to the house in St. George's Square, where on Thursday afternoons there was a constant coming and going of people before long to be known as "The Yellow Book set." To those "Thursdays" I constantly went, sometimes enjoying them, sometimes feeling completely out of my depth and extremely shy with a type of sophisticated men and women hitherto unknown to me.

Not too many years ago, and therefore long, long after those early days, I was at a luncheon-party at the Savoy, where one of the other guests was Robert Ross. My host had told me he was coming, and as we met he said, "It's quite unnecessary to introduce you two, of course?" "Well, no," I replied. "Strangely enough, I don't think I've ever met Mr. Ross before?"

"Now that's very cruel of you, Miss Syrett," he declared, smiling. "I used to meet you frequently at the Beardsleys in the old days."

I apologized, saying he must forgive me, because as

a girl I was so horribly shy of all the clever people I met there that I was often too flustered to know who they were. His reply was very charming. He said, "You *were* shy, and I wonder if you know how many of us found the shyness delightfully refreshing?"

I may mention that the other woman at that luncheon—we were a party of four—was Lottie Venne.

I had previously seen her only on the stage, and in parts that required the Cockney accent, with which I had always associated her. However ridiculous, it was the greatest surprise to me to find she had a pretty cultivated voice, and (though that, of course, was *no* surprise) was exceedingly amusing!

At those Beardsley parties of long ago the man I felt most at home with was Max Beerbohm, and it does not surprise me that his sister, Mrs. Neville, should have said of him, "Max is so *cosy* to live with!"

He was kind; he always took trouble to be pleasant, and to seem interested when he talked to me. He was even then, in Bernard Shaw's later phrase, "the incomparable Max!" "The glass of fashion and the mould of form" also; and though when I first met him the famous Yellow Book had not come into existence, he had already at Oxford, three years previously, written "A Defence of Cosmetics," the first of his essays to be published in that Quarterly when it was launched in 1894.

By that time I was enjoying more gaiety than I had ever known before.

On the strength of having had two or three stories published in magazines, Mabel Beardsley introduced me to the Harlands as a "brilliant young writer" (every one attempting to write or paint was "brilliant" in those days!), and though I didn't recognize myself in the description, I was pleased at being asked to their weekly evening parties, and, considerably less shy than a month

or two previously, often enjoyed them immensely, in spite of the incalculable moods of host and hostess.

The Harlands were more like spoilt children who can be charming when they are good, than any grown-up people I ever met before or since! It never seemed to occur to them to disguise the mood of the moment, however uncomfortable the result to their guests, and really devoted to one another, they bickered in public with as little concern as a couple of quarrelsome children, each of whom appeals for sympathy to the nearest bystander. "Now, *isn't* she unreasonable?"—"Do tell him how selfish he is!" they would exclaim.

I have a lively recollection of an evening in Paris, where I once spent a week with them. We had been to the theatre to see Réjane in *Madame Sans Gêne*, and were to have supper at some restaurant after the play. Henry Harland wanted to go to one place, Mrs. Harland to another, but leading the way, Henry pushed open the doors of the restaurant of *his* choice, and we followed, Aline grumbling all the time. Suddenly enraged, he turned on her with, "*All right, we won't go anywhere at all!*" and there being no alternative, I had to pursue two angry people who, under the astonished gaze of waiters and the diners seated at the tables, rushed out of the room they had just entered. We drove away, husband and wife in sulky silence, and all three of us went supperless to our beds! But when both happened to be in a happy mood their parties went with a swing, and no one could be more amusing than Henry Harland when he pleased, sometimes witty, sometimes purposely absurd in his delightful "silliness."

Nell, the sister who often went with me to the Harlands' house in Cromwell Road, though seventeen or eighteen, looked almost a child, and while she nearly suffocated with laughter, he used to pretend he was

afraid to speak to anyone so young, and must employ me as an interpreter.

"Ask her why they take babies at the Slade?" "Tell her she has very pretty hair," all the while, as though absent-mindedly, buttoning his coat over sofa cushions till he looked like the fat man in a fair.

From this it may be gathered that there was not much conventionality at parties to which, however, every one came in evening dress, and with scarcely an exception every one looked very smart. There was no untidy Bohemianism about "the Yellow Book set." Aubrey Beardsley and Max Beerbohm were two of the best-dressed young men in town, and I vividly recall "Max" on first nights at the theatre immaculate, carrying a tasselled cane. A dandy, if ever there was one!

So many faces, so many scraps of conversation, so many voices, some of them long since silent, crowd to my mind as I try to think back, that it is difficult to know what to select, or to remember where I first met certain men and women belonging to the period now rather absurdly called the "naughty 'nineties."

Not that the friends I made were drawn exclusively from that particular set. Far from it! They have more often been people to whom "the Yellow Book crowd" was, and is, merely a name; people engaged in utterly different activities, pursuing utterly different aims from that *coterie*. I have always been catholic in my tastes in everything—including friends. But at the moment it is chiefly of the Harland and Beardsley households I am thinking.

I recall the drawing-room in St. George's Square, with its deep orange walls, black doors, and black-painted book-cases and fireplaces—a scheme of colour new to me, designed by an early "interior decorator," a friend

of Aubrey's and the forerunner of many young men who now make their living by adorning and sometimes ruining other people's houses. The room was always rather dark, for it was an affectation of the Beardsley set to exclude the "crude light of day."

I see Mabel, the beauty she so confidently expected already achieved, in a dress that vaguely recalled a lady of the Italian Renaissance, seated in a carved, high-backed chair, from which she rose to receive each newcomer with graceful if slightly mannered courtesy. I see Aubrey, his back to one of the windows, talking vivaciously to a group of young men, every now and then making great play with his wonderful hands.

His pale brown hair—"Aubrey's honey-coloured hair," Oscar Wilde called it—was cut so that it looked like a close-fitting cap on his head, and the eyes below it were pale, clear amber. Even then, five years before he died, I never saw such a frail, thin body, nor such an emaciated face, gay and vivacious though it often was.

A photograph of him, in which purposely he has assumed the attitude of one of the demon gargoyles that from the heights of Notre Dame look down upon Paris, forms the frontispiece to Holbrook Jackson's book, *The Eighteen Nineties*.

The expression of the face framed between the amazingly long-fingered hands must, I think, have been also assumed, for it is sullen, brooding, and contemptuous. Though such a look may sometimes have been true to life, it is not characteristic as I remember him.

Few people I met at St. George's Square in the early days of the Beardsley Boom ever became more than acquaintances of mine, and some of them I knew only by sight. Frank Harris was one of these, and the only time I saw Oscar Wilde there, he was leaving the house as I entered it. Most of the habitués seemed to me

very unreal. One might imagine them cleverly made puppets stuffed with sawdust, rather than people of flesh and blood, and in my novel *Strange Marriage* I have tried to suggest the impression they made upon me. But no doubt if I had known them better I should have found them human enough.

I happened to be at the Harlands when the idea of the Yellow Book was first suggested, I think by Henry Harland himself, as we sat round the fire in the drawing-room of the Cromwell Road house, one wet afternoon.

I remember Harland's excited talk—he was like a boy in his enthusiasms—about starting a magazine that should represent the “new movement.” By this time I had grown accustomed to phrases that were the catchwords of the period. *Fin de siècle*. The “new” everything. “The New Woman,” “The New Morality,” “The New Paganism,” to take a few examples. Not to mention the word *decadent* so frequently on the lips of writers. I therefore had an idea of the kind of magazine he meant. “Aubrey” was to be art editor. “Johnny Lane” was to be roped in and persuaded to publish it from The Bodley Head. It was all tentative talk that day, and, leaving London for some weeks soon after, I missed the later stages by which the “magazine” became a *book*, issued quarterly and edited by Harland—the much-discussed Yellow Book. I missed, also, the dinner given at the Florence restaurant in Rupert Street to celebrate the publication of the first number, for my grandfather, because of whose serious illness I was at home, died the day before it appeared.

Two rather curious incidents are connected in my mind with my first Yellow Book story, the scene of which is laid in India.

Some years after its publication Scribner's of New York brought out a series of books, each one bearing as title the name of a country. The idea was to collect and reprint in each of the volumes stories characteristic of the particular country designated by the title. For the book labelled *India* they asked, and received permission, to include this Yellow Book story of mine, because its "atmosphere" was the right one for that land. I have never been to India. The "atmosphere" came out of my imagination, and the few native words I used out of a letter written to me by Nancy Handy, my friend of Swansea days, who had married and gone to India with her husband. I have always maintained that it is much easier, and generally truer to fact, to write about what one *hasn't* than what one *has* seen!

The other incident connected with the same story I remember because it made me for the first time aware of the super-normal faculties possessed by certain individuals.

A friend of mine, a beautiful and brilliant woman much older than I, Christina Denning by name, one day happened to tell me she could see "pictures" in hands. I laughed and, though quite sceptical, asked her to look at mine.

She took them, and after a moment said, "I see a wide, sandy plain, with a line of mountains in the distance. In the foreground there are three white tents, and at the entrance to one of them there's a woman, shading her eyes with her hand."

I was startled, for though I hadn't then begun to write the "Indian" story, the scene—with one exception—had been for days in my mind, *almost* exactly as she described it. The difference was that *I* had imagined only one tent, while she had seen three.

But when a day or two later I began to write it, I

found that it was impossible to tell the story without mentioning the *three* tents Christina Denning had "seen"! This friend of mine, long since dead, had a little daughter who now, as beautiful as her mother before her, has become well known as a lecturer, and I shall have more to say of her later.

In a fairly recent novel of mine already mentioned, *Strange Marriage*, I introduced a conversation between two Bright Young Things of the present day in which they patronizingly allude to "that milk and water Yellow Book to which Aunt Emma used to contribute." If I stand for "Aunt Emma," I'm glad I didn't know at the time how "jejune," to quote Mr. Somerset Maugham, it would seem to the *intelligentsia* forty years later!

It would have robbed me of a great deal of innocent pleasure and half-incredulous pride to find myself a contributor to a Quarterly which, as he rightly says, "at that time seemed the last thing in sophisticated intelligence." His speculation as to how youthful writers in yet another forty years will regard the work of the Bright Young Things of the moment is interesting, but whatever form their condemnation (it is sure to be *condemnation*!) takes, I scarcely think they will find it "jejune." If unreticence is still in favour, they may even feel annoyance at the little their predecessors have left them to say. It will be difficult, for instance, to "go one better" on the subject of sex, or to find still more nauseating phrases than those already written, when these young writers deal with dirt, disease, and abnormality of every kind. In case these remarks should be misunderstood, I hasten to add that I have a great admiration for much of the work of the younger generation. This for my own gratification (since I do not flatter myself that any Bright Young Thing will care one way

or the other for an old woman's opinion!) I hope to express in a later chapter. But I am quite prepared for a swing of the pendulum that will reinstate a puritanism that I should enjoy as little as I now enjoy the cult of ugliness that obtains among a few of the "advanced." Who knows what the future may hold for the coming generation in the way of mechanized substitutes for books, or whether the word "literature" will have any meaning whatever? By that time, however, I shall long since have ceased to take interest in writing of any kind—even if the madness that now threatens the world should mercifully pass and allow writing among other activities of civilization to exist at all.

Poor outmoded Yellow Book! I retain a sentimental affection for it, and certainly the period to which it gave its name was amusing and thrilling enough to many of us, and full of creative effort. Much of it was affected and trivial, certainly, but for this the hangers-on of the movement were to blame rather than its founders.

There were many real artists in "the movement," and Aubrey Beardsley remains for me the only human being I ever met in whom I recognized *genius*. Heaven knows how the mere boy he was when I first saw him, a boy, moreover, who had received a very ordinary education, had acquired the knowledge he possessed of rare recondite literature, of music as well as of pictorial art! A *perverse* genius certainly he was—(it has always been the mingling of great beauty and horrible evil in his black-and-white drawings that both fascinates and repels me), but a genius unmistakably.

I never knew him at all well, though well enough to recognize not only the charm of his manner, but the *kindness* which was part of his strange nature, a quality that was also Mabel's most endearing characteristic. When he was at the height of his fame he took the

trouble to write to my sister Nell, then a very youthful art student, advising her not to stay too long at the school, but to go her own way—as he had done. He sent her at the time a clever pen-and-ink sketch of Professor Brown of the Slade, and some charming little processional figures in pencil, both of which a few years ago she presented to the Tate Gallery.

In recalling our life in Ashley Gardens as girls, I realize that we worked as well as played.

Before she was one-and-twenty the sister to whom, as I have just mentioned, Aubrey Beardsley gave advice had a little picture show of her own in a gallery somewhere near Oxford Circus, and sold for small sums of one or two guineas many of her sketches and charming designs for fans.

Several years ago I saw one of the latter in the window of a shop in Charing Cross Road, and out of curiosity went in and asked its price.

"Forty pounds, madam," said the young man in charge. "It's a Conder."

"You're mistaken. It's a Syrett," I replied, and went out, leaving him gasping and mystified. . . .

Another sister was getting several of her excellent designs for textile fabrics accepted and reproduced when she married, and, like so many women while their children are young, ceased to exercise her gift. Now that the children are grown up and in their turn married, she is so absorbed in tending her lovely garden that she cannot be persuaded to practise her art again.

Yet a third, Kate, who when we were first in town was at Bedford College, did not begin her art career till the London flat was given up, and she went to Paris, where for many years she lived. Before the war, and until the slump in trade which followed it, she was one of the best artists, working for a wealthy firm in England.

Her designs for fabrics better judges than I consider remarkable, and if talent always received its deserts, she should still be making an excellent living. But a *flair* for money-making is something which as a family we have never possessed, and I have been no exception to the rule.

"Don't dissipate yourself in society, my dear!" Sarah Grand said to me when I met her at a party some time after her own success with her novel, *The Heavenly Twins*, and just after the publication of the first of mine, which was also widely noticed.

I had little chance to do that, for though I had ceased to be a professional teacher in the sense of making teaching a whole-time job, the little I earned by writing short stories would not have enabled me to contribute to the expenses of the flat, in which I had two rooms to myself, without the lectures I gave in various schools.

For a long time, indeed, in rather exceptionally delightful circumstances, I used to teach all the morning, and when I wasn't going to a party, write all the evening. It was only when my first novel was published that I felt I really belonged to the confraternity of authors.

John Lane was bringing out a series of novels by the younger writers of the day, called *The Keynote Series*, each book bearing on its cover a key specially designed by Aubrey Beardsley, and it was in this series that my first novel, *Nobody's Fault*, appeared.

It is years since I read or even saw the book, for though I suppose some members of my family still possess it, I have long since lost my copy. That its disappearance is no great tragedy a vague memory no doubt rightly suggests, but in the far-off days of its perpetration, youth, as it is to-day, was at the prow, and I recall long and enthusiastic reviews which at the time filled me with delight and, much more important, my

father and mother with pride and satisfaction. I was at our country home when a letter of most charming and generous praise came to me from Mrs. Harland, and I am glad to remember the pleasure in my father's face when I passed it to him. Fortunately it is not as a rule necessary to be a genius to please one's parents!

It was at the Harlands rather than at the Beardsleys that I met people who became more than acquaintances—I made friends—often in an altogether different set of circumstances with men and women who were afterwards included in the Harland circle. Among these were Jim Welch, the actor, and his wife Sissie, Richard le Gallienne's sister. All three were friends of the Grant Allens, and before I met them myself I used to hear much about them when I stayed at Hindhead.

Jim and Sissie had a flat in Gray's Inn, overlooking the sweeping lawns and lovely trees of its garden. It was there I first met Julie Norregard, who a little later married the widower, Richard le Gallienne. She is the mother of the well-known actress Eva le Gallienne who lives in America and founded the famous Civic Repertory Theatre. I have not seen Eva since she was a tiny girl, living then with her mother and half-sister Hesper in Paris, but Julie is still a dear friend of mine, as till their deaths were Jim and Sissie Welch. Arnold and Alice Hannay also were people I knew before they became acquainted with the Harlands. Arnold Hannay, then a wealthy man and an art collector, was a friend of Whistler's and possessed many of his finest pictures. Some of these hung on the walls of his London house, others were at the charming villa in Dieppe, where for many years I spent part of every summer.

But many of my friends and acquaintances, even those one might have expected to belong to the Yellow

Book set, either by chance or from choice, so far as I am aware, did not. Richard Pryce, St. John Hankin, Hamilton Fyfe, Laurence Housman, for instance, I never met either at the Harlands' or at the Beardsleys'. I made their acquaintance elsewhere, and most of them came to our parties at the flat. On what we called "state occasions," such as the party on the eve of the marriage of one of my sisters, my mother used to come up from the country to preside as hostess. Otherwise we arranged our own, invited anyone we pleased, and I think people enjoyed them.

Our flat was something of an institution in the days when as young hostesses we entertained. The cocktail and sherry age not having dawned, tea, coffee, and cakes provided afternoon refreshment, claret cup, lemonade, and sandwiches the evening fare.

"We was all girls together then," an old servant of ours said rather sadly when, years after, she left to get married. I met her one day in an omnibus—both of us by that time middle-aged women.

The mention of her recalls many of the strange or amusing maids we had in those old days. Surely servants are less original and interesting than they were before the advent of the Cinema, the Whist Drive, and the Beauty Parlour? Strangest of all our maids was a girl who called herself *Lenna*, under the impression that this was the right pronounciation of Lenore, the romantic name by which she was christened. She lived in a dream of her own, of which occasionally we were allowed puzzled glimpses. Once, to the horror of the sister who did the housekeeping, a huge lump of coal was found under the bed of Lenore, and all she would say in response to indignant questioning was, "*A dark man.*"

The cryptic words as an explanation seemed irrele-

vant, but as they were all she vouchsafed, the matter, like the coal she returned to the scuttle, was allowed to drop. Some months later I read in an article on "Superstitions" that coal placed under the bed of a woman who desired a dark-haired lover was a sure means of attracting a young man of the requisite colouring. Poor Lenore! If she ever found him he displayed no coming-on disposition, for the last time I heard of her she was still a maiden.

How seldom now does one meet a charwoman of the type of one who used to come to us for the spring cleaning, garrulous, unconsciously amusing, with a gift for making the simple place in which she happened to be working assume the importance and grandeur of a palace. "Oh! *don't* put the umbrella-stand there, miss. It ruins the majesty of the 'all!'" she once exclaimed when my sister was rearranging furniture in the Morpeth Terrace flat.

To the graphic accounts of the deaths in her family it was difficult to listen with becoming gravity. Of a little granddaughter we were told, "She made a lovely end, sayin' the Lord's Prayer and the multiplication table up to seven times, till the last. . . ."

"Do you think many working people will make use of this divorce business if it becomes law?" I asked a maid when there was talk of legal help for the poor, in that connection.

"Every one in *our* street!" she returned cheerfully. Is it necessary to state that Rose was not a spinster?

CHAPTER VI

FRIENDS—AND MARRIAGES

TWO or three years before the flat in Morpeth Terrace to which we later moved was given up, I several times left it for rooms of my own. Once for nearly a year I lived at what was then "the Victorian," and later became the New Victorian Club in Sackville Street, a much enlarged and grander edition of the simple little place I knew long ago.

Four of us—the youngest of its members—had tiny bedrooms at the top of the house. The girl who had the room next to me was Evelyn Sharp, now Mrs. H. W. Nevinson, and to-day, though we seldom see one another, when we do happen to meet it is certainly with pleasure on my part, and I think also on hers. But long ago at that little club she and I used to have a great deal of fun in those attic rooms, whose windows were so close together that a great deal of conversation went on in the open air when we put our heads out of them to talk to our neighbours. What a dangerous place in case of fire that top landing was I have since shuddered to remember! The rooms were narrow cubicles divided by matchboarding partitions, candles the sole illumination at night, one twisting staircase the sole means of egress.

I remember coming in very late after some party, and seeing light under the door of one of the rooms I knocked several times. There was no answer, so I went in to find the girl to whom the room belonged lying on her back asleep, with a candlestick holding a lighted candle on her chest, the leaves of the book she

had been reading close to the flame! It was this girl who later became converted to some religious cult, the nature of which may be guessed from the terse admonition I received on a post-card signed with her name, *You must either believe, or else go to hell*, a laconic gem which I quoted in what I suppose is my best known novel, *Portrait of a Rebel*.

"There's nowt so queer as folk," Jim Welch used to say.

With another friend I made at that little club in Sackville Street I afterwards shared a flat in Soho Square, later to be described, for it was an unusually interesting one.

Mollie Clugston and I have known one another for a greater number of years than I can with any accuracy remember, and in connection with these reminiscences of mine only the other day she remarked what nonsense many modern novelists talk about the lack of liberty for girls when she and I were young. Even before my sisters and I had our own flat, when she was little more than twenty and had begun practice as an accountant, she lived in London alone in rooms, just as a young man engaged in some profession or business might live.

Even in the 'eighties, so long as a girl was working at some art, profession, or business, she was perfectly free, and could go about her lawful occasions without censure—even from the censorious.

It was Mollie Clugston who, soon after we met, took me to the house of that excellent "black-and-white" artist, E. J. Sullivan. He and his wife lived in a pretty little house in St. John's Wood, and knew a great many painters, and a few literary men. It was there I met Manville Fenn, who in collaboration with a now very old friend of mine, Richard Pryce, wrote the charm-

ing one-act play, *'Op o' my Thumb*, in which Hilda Trevelyan made her name as an actress.

I should like to see that play revived, though perhaps so far as I am concerned my memory of it is better undisturbed. It dwells with me as a perfect little work of art, almost unbearably touching in its pathos, and I don't want to see anyone but Hilda Trevelyan in the part of the poor, plain little "*'Op o' my Thumb*," whose happiness in believing she has at last found a "young man" is so cruelly shattered.

There was a great deal more informal, almost casual, entertaining in those pre-war days of long ago than now exists. At many houses, for instance, it was an understood thing that one could drop in for Sunday night supper as to an indoor picnic, the men of the party acting as waiters.

The Sullivans' house was one in which during the summer this custom prevailed, and in thinking back, I have certain of those curiously vivid memories in connection with it which remain in the mind like flood-lit pictures of which every detail is recalled.

One is of the little garden at the back of the house, from which an ironwork staircase, wreathed about with a vine that also framed the windows, led to the lawn.

I see Manville Fenn, young, graceful, elegant, coming down that staircase to join those of us already in the garden. The picture is bright with late evening sunshine, and the young man's figure stands out clear and beautiful in my mind.

I never knew him very well; it was his collaborator, Richard Pryce, who became a much more intimate friend. But one of my sisters and I went several times to tea at his rooms in Clifford's Inn, and I remember an amusing, rather large supper-party there. Afterwards, several of us went up a staircase to look at a

wide crack in the floor over which Fenn had to leap to reach his bedroom every night! The house was old and dilapidated, but the sitting-room, its floor like the waves of the sea for undulation, was very beautiful, for its walls were decorated with carvings by Grinling Gibbons. That house, with many others (there is now only a corner of Clifford's Inn left), was demolished years ago, but a part of the room in which I once sat at a gay supper-party is in the South Kensington Museum.

On one of the Sunday evenings at the Sullivans I dimly remember a young couple—the wife very tiny and shy—to whom, as it happened, I was not introduced, but was afterwards told were a Mr. and Mrs. H. G. Wells. I am hopeless about dates, but I think this must have been before any, even of the earliest, Wellsian novels had appeared, because my only reaction to the name was the thought of Lizzie Healey and the possibility that the young man might be the writer of the letters of which she used to tell me.

About this time matrimony began to break out among the sisterhood in the Morpeth Terrace flat.

Georgie, the sister next to me in age was the first to become engaged—to a young doctor, a friend of my eldest brother, both of them Bart's men, and both recently qualified. The rest of us watched the first stage of the courtship with excited interest and amusement (a love-affair needs some courage in a large family), and while this was in progress, one of us suggested that to give a picnic would be a change from the more usual form of entertainment.

Very far back in time is that summer day on which we went to the then rural Pinner, yet out of the mist that the passing years has drawn across it I hear laughter

and see faces I shall hear and see no more. Of the young men who were our guests at that picnic one was St. John Hankin, whose tragic fate years later came as a great shock to me when just as I was starting on a journey I bought a paper and read in the train the name of the "well-known dramatist" whose death was announced on posters in the station.

Others I remember who talked and laughed as we sat about on the grass were Evelyn Sharp, Mollie Clugston, both still in this world with me, and Sissie Welch, long since dead. A great friend of hers, and for long of mine also, was Egan Mew, and it is to him I owe the memory of a delightful end to the day of the picnic. Several of us went back with him to his rooms in The Temple, where we found a delicious supper prepared. Egan Mew was always a delightful host, as well as one of the most amusing people I ever met, and I recall the laughter at that candle-lit supper-table, with its flowers and glass and china making a coloured island in the shadowy room, its windows wide open to the warm summer night.

My sister's engagement, announced soon after the day of the picnic, lasted two years, while her future husband was building up a practice, and life at the flat went on more or less as usual.

It was only when three out of the five of us had married that it was given up. Kate then went to Paris, and I eventually shared a flat with a friend.

None of the husbands of the three who married belonged to the Harland-Beardsley set. If these men married at all it was late in life, but most of them remained bachelors, with just enough money to make life pleasant and comfortable for themselves and none to spare for a wife and possible children.

Soon after the first wedding in the family, another sister, Mabel, married a young solicitor, and to-day a grandmother, one of her chief interests, as I have said, is the garden of her beautiful Sussex home. The painter sister, Nell, has long been the wife of a man very well known in many and widely differing circles as *Peter* rather than *Joseph Thorp*—his real name.

In *Friends and Memories* he has all too briefly, as I think, described his manifold activities, including his nineteen years' association with *Punch*. As dramatic critic on that well-known weekly he became familiar to thousands of readers as "T" of *Punch*.

But I shall return later to "Peter."

CHAPTER VII

FRIENDS AND PARTIES

THE Yellow Book phase of London literary life lasted some years. It was Oscar Wilde's tragedy that killed it, for the Quarterly itself ceased to be very interesting even to the young people of the 'nineties when its art editor, Aubrey Beardsley, left it to work for the *Savoy*, published by Leonard Smithers.

Even before he broke his association with the Yellow Book, and in spite of his indomitable spirit, Aubrey was very ill. I remember going to see Mabel one morning and finding him working on a *Salome* drawing at a table pushed up against one wall of the darkened room. Two tall candles, one on either side of him, were burning on the table, and from time to time he turned his head over his shoulder to speak to Mabel and me, as we sat talking. All at once he got up abruptly, a handkerchief at his lips, and went out of the room. I saw there was blood on the handkerchief.

His craze for darkness in a room even when the sun was shining always worried and annoyed me. It was an affectation, of course, a form of exhibitionism, a flaunting of perversity which only his youth excused. But when one remembers that he died at five-and-twenty, it is not difficult to find excuses for the attitudinizing of a brilliant boy, young enough to enjoy shocking the "bourgeois." (The word had a different meaning then!)

Recently, in talking over these Yellow Book days with my eldest married sister, she told me how one frightfully hot summer day she met Mrs. Beardsley,

who asked her to go back with her to St. George's Square to tea.

"We'll have it on the balcony," she said.

To reach the balcony they had to go through the drawing-room, where Aubrey sat drawing by candle-light, the windows at either end of the room closely curtained.

He refused to join them on the balcony for tea, and his mother took a cup back into the artificially lighted room for him. But later he strolled out into the air and sat on the balustrade.

As my sister shrewdly remarked, "Of course, he was really dying to get out of that stuffy room all the time!"

Poor gifted boy! He died two or three years later at Mentone, after he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church—the refuge sought at the end of their hectic lives by several of his contemporaries and by some much older men—Oscar Wilde and Henry Harland among them. The first time I went to Mentone I found his grave and sent some flowers and leaves from it to his mother and sister. The grave was on the edge of a terrace, from which one looked down on to the sapphire-coloured sea. A lovely spot which many years afterwards I tried in vain to find.

The war had intervened, and the place I remembered as more like a garden than a cemetery was crowded with tomb-stones, and I could nowhere find the one I sought. But there was no one left to whom I could have sent a leaf or a flower, even if I *had* found it, for Aubrey's mother and his beautiful sister by then had followed the son and brother from this world.

For some few years I continued to meet most of the people in the "movement" at the Harlands' house.

I remember an evening when host and hostess were simultaneously in one of their "impossible" moods. At such times, like the two naughty, sulky children they sometimes appeared, they never troubled to introduce people, and as it happened, the few guests in the room were all strangers to me. No special invitations were given for these "evenings," which were sometimes crowded, while occasionally only one or two people put in an appearance. On this particular night those who were acquainted stood about near the fire listening to some grievance of Aline Harland's, the only other occupants of the room being a young man—a guest there for the first time—and myself.

As our hostess made no sign, the young man—it was Stephen Phillips—crossed the room to me, and we talked the whole evening and became more than a little interested in one another! Some time later his play, *Paolo and Francesca*, was put on at the St. James's Theatre, and I saw for the first time Henry Ainley, who, as Paolo, was as beautiful a youth as any who in history or fiction has lured a woman from the path of duty. Also for the first time on the same stage was a charmingly graceful girl I was later not only to know but to have much to do with. Her name was Lilian Braithwaite, and I believe her part as Francesca's attendant lady was the first she ever played in London.

Yet another incident at the Harlands' remains with me as a very clear-cut memory. I was there one afternoon with a few other people (one of whom was Kenneth Graham) when the post came in, and Henry, this time in one of his irresponsibly high-spirited moods, opened a large envelope containing a poem of some length, which he proceeded to read aloud and burlesque.

It was John Davidson's "Ballad of a Nun."

THE SHELTERING TREE

Some of the lines, even as read in a purposely absurd voice, struck me as magnificent:

“The adventurous sun took Heaven by storm

. . . The sounding cities rich and warm
Smouldered and glittered in the plain,”

—and when, half read, he threw the manuscript aside, I said, “I like it,” Kenneth Graham backed me up with, “So do I,” yet Harland, still in a perverse mood, continued to scoff.

But of course he knew the poem was good, and duly published it in the Yellow Book. Later Owen Seaman, wickedly amusing, parodied it in the “Ballad of a Bun.”

One of the habitués at the Harlands’ became very well known to me, and as she several times stayed at our country home, to the whole family also. So brief are most literary reputations that I suppose none of the younger generation of to-day ever heard of Ella D’Arcy. But in the ’nineties, and especially taking into account her very small output, the praise she received as a writer was astonishing.

A slim volume of short stories reprinted from the Yellow Book, at most two very short novels, and a translation from the French represent the whole of her literary activity; for though her prose was indeed distinguished, and she herself very clever and amusing, she was the laziest woman I ever met! She once came for a fortnight to a little flat in Paris which had been lent to me, and every morning during my own hours of work I used to lock her into her room, with strict orders to write.

Instead, she read French novels on the balcony, and when I released her, merely laughed and owned she hadn’t even taken up her pen. When she first came to

us, my parents and the younger members of the family were living at Warnham Place, in Sussex, not far from Field Place where Shelley was born. Ella had some kind of introduction to its then inhabitants, so we walked there one day, for she was very anxious to go over the house if that should be possible. For some reason—I believe because the owners were away—we could not go in, but I was glad to wander through part of the grounds and to see the pond about which, as a boy, Shelley used to frighten his sister with tales of the monsters that dwelt in it.

It was Ella D'Arcy who, fairly recently, translated into English Maurois' *Ariel*; and I have no doubt that all those summers ago she was playing with the idea of writing something about Shelley. That she never did more than play with it would be characteristic of her.

But in spite of her erratic behaviour and lack of dependability in word and deed, she could be a delightful, amusing, and often witty companion. We called her "Goblin Ella" and pretended that when she disappeared for months, even years, at a time, and then one day walked into our London flat as though she had been absent half an hour, she had flown to a Witches' Sabbath on her broomstick and returned by the same means. We all liked her, including my mother and father, who were much amused by a clever device of hers for sending a greeting to every member of the family one Christmas when she knew we should all be at Warnham Place. On Christmas morning each of us received a picture-postcard reproduction of some well-known painting in the Louvre (she was living in Paris at the time), with words by her upon it which made sense only when, beginning with my father, what was written on each card was read aloud by the recipients in order of age.

A complimentary and very charming message to the whole family, interwoven with the subject of the pictures, then emerged. Her letters were some of the most amusing I ever read, and but for her incurable idleness she should have made if not a great, at least a very distinguished, writer of elegant and witty prose.

It saddened me to read some months ago the following laconic notice in the *Deaths* column of the *Daily Telegraph*. *September* (with a date), *In London, Ella D'Arcy*.

This seems the place and the moment to speak of another writer who, unlike Ella D'Arcy, while she was still able to do so took her work very seriously, wrote much, and, as my contemporaries at least know, has a great literary reputation. She lives now far away in the country, and as it is several years since she has written anything, it may be that younger people are unaware of her importance.

I met her long ago at one of the dinners given by the Society of Authors. Someone drew my attention to a very small, rather pretty little woman, with eyes that, though not large, had a peculiar dark glow. She was seated at the table next to mine, and when I heard her name was May Sinclair, I determined to thank her for her then recent and I believe first novel, *Mr. and Mrs. Nevill Tyson*. Accordingly, during the coffee stage of the dinner, I introduced myself, and was enthusiastic about her book. Those who know May Sinclair's quiet manner will not be surprised to hear that I found her response a little chilling. It was only years later, when I knew her well, and by that time realized how difficult it was for her—a very reticent woman—to express herself to strangers, that she told me how pleased she had been “inside,” how what I said delighted and encouraged her.

Sitting beside her that long-past evening was her guest, Miss Bird, the sister of old Dr. Bird, famous in his day not only as a doctor, but as the friend of many celebrated people in the literary world of a bygone age, and I am tempted to digress a moment on the subject of that wonderful old man, met once, but never forgotten by me.

Long before the "Authors' Society" dinner, when I was a very young girl, I was invited to a tea-party somewhere in London at which the Grant Allens were also guests. From them I had heard much of Dr. Bird and his sister, who were intimate friends of theirs, and I knew they were coming to the party. Just as I entered the room I heard a very handsome old gentleman remark to someone, "*As Charles Lamb once said to me . . .*"

I did not hear what Charles Lamb had said, being too much occupied in wondering whether my ears had deceived me. But they had not, for Lamb used to visit Dr. Bird's parents, and as a boy he himself had known him well.

We were introduced, and I remember being very proud and delighted that he spoke of me to the Grant Allens afterwards as "that charming little girl." I should have been sorry not to have found favour in the eyes of a very charming old gentleman! He must have been well over ninety at the time, but he looked vigorous and hale and hearty enough to be twenty years younger.

May Sinclair was only at the outset of her fame as a novelist when I spoke to her at the aforementioned dinner. Later, it so much increased that she was considered by good authorities the most important woman writer of the day.

I came to know her very well, and for some years

saw a great deal of her, for as a friend of my friends the Hannays I was her fellow-guest at their delightful villa at Dieppe. We met often in town, and at Stow-on-the-Wold, where she took a room in the comfortable old White Hart Inn, furnished it, and went there whenever she wanted to write in quietude. Several times I spent a summer holiday at Stow, at the same inn, and May and I used to drive with Alice Hannay over the beautiful Cotswold country in the car from which Alice would never be separated.

By that time May was at the height of her literary reputation, and had written a great many novels—*The Divine Fire*, *Mary Olivier*, *The Tree of Heaven*, *The Combined Maze*, to mention only a few of them. The last-named book was dramatized by Frank Vosper and acted at one of the London theatres, Jean Forbes Robertson playing the chief part.

She wrote much at Stow, generally in a little hut built for her by the village carpenter in a field from which she had a glorious view over tilted meadows, streams, woods, and hills blue in the distance.

She is a woman of great intellectual distinction, and her book on metaphysics is, I believe, considered of importance by those able to judge it—of whom I am not one! Deeply interested in psychology, Freud, Jung, Adler have provided her with many themes, chiefly for her short stories.

She has always been a very silent woman, but nothing escapes those "smouldering eyes" of hers—to employ someone's descriptive phrase—and those who know her well can testify to her characteristically quiet sense of humour. "Don't be so boisterous, Miss Sinclair!" said Mark Twain at a dinner in her honour when she was in America, and she could laugh just because the admonition was so palpably absurd!

She lives now far from town and her friends, in the same simple fashion as by her own choice she lived when she was making a great deal of money—most of which she gave away in a recklessly generous fashion.

Circumstances have made it some years now since I saw her, but then, when I urged her to write again, she said sadly, "If only I could find a theme!"

She never speaks of it, but I think she knows she is ill, and even if by chance she should ever read this little tribute to a very distinguished woman, I think she will not mind if I quote something she once said which now often comes to my mind in connection with her.

"Oh! but I suppose we shan't keep our birthdays in Heaven?" someone had exclaimed lightly in the course of a more or less frivolous conversation.

"Perhaps we shall keep our *death* days," came the reply in May's quiet little voice.

It is a comforting suggestion to those of us for whom life is no longer such an exhilarating adventure as once it was—the death-day that is also the birth-day!

To write of long friendships inevitably means leaping far ahead of youth, and since youth is so crowded with experiences, the retracing of one's mental footsteps entails elimination of much that at the time was significant and memorable, at least to oneself. Such gaieties as dances and parties, for instance, sometimes meant nothing much more than an evening's enjoyment of dancing. On other occasions, because of some chance encounter, they had emotional consequences, pleasant or the reverse, but in either case of no concern to anyone but the recipient.

Among the merely frivolous but delightful experiences I recall were the dances given by the distinguished painter Ethel Walker and her friend Clara Christian in

their Chelsea studio, which on these occasions, lighted by candles, made a charming setting for pretty dresses, and for girls whose prettiness owed less to make-up than does youthful beauty nowadays.

A yearly event of long ago was the party given by Violet Hunt in a garden that has now disappeared. The bricks and stones of buildings (one of them a hostel for Queen Mary's nurses) now cover the large, leafy garden on Campden Hill, which the tenants of houses round about it had the right to use for their own private parties once a year.

Herself a well-known novelist, and the daughter of parents also well known in the literary and artistic world of an earlier day, Violet Hunt had an enormous circle of acquaintances, and at her garden-parties I was certain to meet nearly every one I already knew, and a great many others for the first time. I always enjoyed them, and one of the earliest at which I was a guest stands out from the rest because of a ridiculous little experience that followed it, one that, when I think of it, never ceases to amuse me.

I had promised friends living in Chelsea to dine with them, and it was arranged that I should go on from the garden-party to their house. I did so, and stayed there talking till very late. They were people who sat up till all hours, and it must have been twelve o'clock before they would let me go. My host, though amusing, was eccentric, and much too lazy to be at any time a squire of dames. It never occurred to him to call a hansom for me, and as there wasn't one in sight when the hall door closed upon me, the night being fine and warm, I decided to walk to the King's Road and take one there. Flood Street was the nearest short cut, and though I was unaware of it, at the time Flood Street had an unsavoury reputation. Conscious of being very

unsuitably dressed for such a late hour, I was rather relieved to see a policeman strolling towards me. Relief, however, gave place to ill-controlled laughter when as he passed me this all-too-human member of the force gave me the glad eye and tenderly observed, "'Ullo, ducky! Out alone? Is that right?'" I didn't blame him. I had no business to be walking at midnight in a gaily-flowered frock and a lace hat as big as a cart-wheel!

This mention of dress reminds me of how much in these modern days we have to be thankful for in regard to clothes. The worst period of discomfort, however, was over by the time of that just recorded day of the garden-party, though I believe we still wore horrible little crinkly collar-supports which always came undone at the top and stuck into one's neck, and hats that bore no relation to the head, which except in a dead calm whirled about on large hat-pins protruding to the danger of the public. How terribly ugly these hats were I only realized when I went to the Sargent portrait exhibition some years ago and saw these shapeless monstrosities perched not upon the heads of his sitters, but on puffed-out hair over frameworks of wire, or pads of some nameless material.

But it was in my quite early girlhood that the worst of the tight-lacing obtained, when even the slightest of us, and though very slim I was no exception to the rule, wore corsets inches too small for us. It was the lack of the wasp-like waist that in *Bitter Sweet* made the dresses of the 'eighties and early 'nineties worn by modern young women look so clumsy and awkward. One never knows what the next fashionable vagary may be, but in spite of a tendency to return to some of the features of mid-Victorian dress, which (regarding them as the thin end of the wedge) I view with horror, I trust that tight-lacing will never return.

The girls of to-day do not realize how well off they are in the matter of comfort; and modern taste in dress, or rather *undress*, must make life a paradise for the children. When I see them looking lovely in their brief thin garments I think of the awful piqué frocks of my childhood, so stiffly starched that the arm-holes were torturing, and I rejoice that for the youngest generation fashion has become sensible as well as pretty.

It is quite useless for me to attempt to put events in their proper sequence, for I am hopeless about Time (which, after all, is a mystery!), but there came a day when I light-heartedly undertook the education of a little group of delightful children. For reasons that seem good to me, in relating this episode I shall change the names of all those concerned in it. But in every other respect it is a faithful record of two or three years of happy relationship with children of long ago.

CHAPTER VIII

AN UNORTHODOX SCHOOL

MISS STUART was a somewhat elderly woman, and not much more than an acquaintance of mine when she first made the proposition which, after some thought, I accepted. A little nephew and niece—I will call them Roger and Katherine—had come to live with her, and to give them companionship she had decided to take a few other children into her house to be educated with them. Declaring (quite unreasonably) that I alone could teach them as she wanted them taught, she begged me to undertake their education, giving me an absolutely free hand to do what I pleased, in the way I pleased; flatteringly certain that she might leave the matter at that!

With the stipulation that someone else should instruct them in arithmetic and grammar, two subjects I detested, I finally agreed, and soon found I had acquired the most charming little class in the most unconventional "school" that any unorthodox teacher could desire.

The boy, Roger, was eight, and his sister Katherine, I think, between twelve and thirteen when I first met them at Miss Stuart's house in one of London's leafy squares. A cousin of theirs, Mary Macdonald, about Katherine's age, was with them, and this Scotch contingent was joined by two English girls, Janie Meadows and Margaret Gibson. Later, as the four girls grew older, others came in daily for certain lessons. But it was the original little set of five I knew and loved best. They were all intelligent children, and though so much

younger than the girls, Roger, a most amusing child, perfectly at home in a feminine community, held his own very well with them.

There was no difficulty about making them work, for they were all interested and keen. But though the relationship between teacher and taught reached the limit of unconventionality, never once did I find any of them lacking in the most charming courtesy towards me.

As I think of these children, all kinds of amusing incidents come to mind, among them a conversation reported to me by the lady who looked after their physical welfare. A little girl, a recent acquaintance of Katherine's, had come to tea, and was bombarding her young hostess with questions.

"Do you go to school?"

"No."

"Oh, then I suppose you have a governess?"

"No."

"Well!"—with amazed superiority—"if you don't go to school and you don't have a governess, you can't be educated!"

"Not educated?" returned Katherine, casting a withering glance at the visitor. "I should just think we *are*! Why, we have an *authoress* to teach us!"

In looking over old papers the other day I came across a large envelope labelled "*Children*," and I cannot resist giving extracts from the following letters. The first one was received a few weeks after I had begun my morning visits to the house in Silver Square, as I shall call the pretty garden-like enclosure upon which it looked:

Dearest Miss Syrett,

Roger and I have just had a committe meeting, and

we have made up our minds that you are "awfully" nice, and so we have admitted you into our circle of Great Friends—that means that we do not love you in the Bible sort of way but in Our Own Way. We are greatly concerned and puzzled about one thing and we want you to give us your honest opinion upon the subject. You know Roger and I always give the one or two people we "really" love a name of our own. . . . We can't make up our minds whether it would be quite "respectful" to call you by a Pet Name. Do you think it would? Of course we should choose a stately dignified gay sort of name, if there is such a one. . . . I think Valquegles [Velazquez?] would be nice, but unfortunately Mrs. G—— has a cat baptized that name, so the asocation would be low. I am writing instead of waiting till Monday because you can then think it over on Sunday and also because I am a stumbling Orator.

I hope you will not think we are lacking in dignified honour and respect to you—we only want to number you among Great Friends and it is our rule to give to such a special name. Roger and I both think you are worthy of confidentiality. . . . Please take this into quite as deep consideration as you would a sollomn offer of marriage.

I am your loving

KATHERINE

Beneath this signature I see the following confirmation of the proposal:

I have read this letter and aprove of all Katherine has said.

ROGER

Before I transcribe parts of the letter I received from Roger a week or two later, when he and his sister were at the sea for Whitsuntide, I wish to disclaim all responsibility for the somewhat startling morality it dis-

closes! The question of the "special name" had been settled with the explanation from Katherine that a "Joy-penny" was something very nice and unexpected. I was unexpectedly nice and so a Joy-penny!

Here in his round, childish writing is the little boy's letter, anticipating in places certain trends of modern thought:

My dear Joy,

This is our new name for you. Your Baptisaml name is Joy-Penny, but this is too long for common use, so we are going to call you Joy for short. Do you like it? If not, we must think of another name and re-baptize you.

I don't think that any word of three letters expresses you (it is not quite dignified enough), but Katherine does. . . . Thank you awfully for your lovely long letter, I am answering it at once because I want to get another letter from you before we go home. You see I am not hinting. I'm saying it broad and square!

I have not yet cured Puck [their dog] of his tendency to suicide, but perhaps experience has, for last week he fell over the cliff and only Mr. Sherlock Homes (the paper child of Conan Doyle and he is the most interesting author I know except yourself and you'r an authoress) could decide whether it was an accident or done on purpose. . . .

We went to Birchington last week. I think Rosseti's grave is beautiful, they have cut down one of the Lilack trees, but it is still a sweet spot. Nice man! [The last literature lesson had been on the subject of Rossetti because the children were going to stay near his burial-place.] I wonder if he writes poetry in the other world? Perhaps you will still write fairy stories when you'r dead for the little boy and girl angels to read!

I have been thinking a great deal about my Harem. You shall be one of my favourite wives. You shall have a

night out once a week, and all your dresses made in Paris. You shall wear a scarlet robe of the finest satin, flaring poppies in your hair, and scarlet shoes.

You shall have Rubiss, Emarlds, Topazs and Diamonds, all set in a gold chain about your neck. You must carry in your hand a fan made of great purple poppies and you shall walk in a garden full of sunflowers and hollyhocks. . . . I think I shall be a sailor when I'm grown up, and during my voyages I shall let my Harem to another man. This will be a nice little change for my wives. . . . We quite approve of your wall paper because we love harebells. They are really the Blue bells of Scotland, so you can think of us when you see their dainty heads nodding at you.

Good-bye, our dear Foy.

*Your loving Thick-headed, Wooden pated faithful old
Slow Coach,*

DUMBLEDORE

Being a literal person you will know what a dumbledore is.

Roger's favourite "wives" would certainly not be lacking in experience!

In a letter from Katherine enclosed in this rather remarkable effort for a boy of eight, I read:

I think the sea air makes Roger talk and think a great deal about his Harem. . . . He says he will never allow you to wear any faded artistic sort of colours, but only those "as bright as the blast of a trumpet." Isn't he an odd boy?

He certainly was; and when I am inclined to think that the children of to-day are more advanced, "born

cleverer" than those of yesterday, I remember Roger and Katherine, and am not so sure.

Here is a further passage from Katherine's letter:

We had such curious weather yesterday. Brilliant sunshine inland, and a fog at sea, the horizon was quite blotted out, and the ships looked almost as if they were sailing in a misty blue sky. One or two fishing smacks were anchored near the shore, their brown sails threw long shadows right down into the water. It was so hot, not a breath of wind, and every now and then we heard the fog horns. What a weird sound they make!

Surely that is well observed and well described for a child barely thirteen?

I haven't seen Roger since at the age of ten he went to a preparatory school (where, to my gratification, in his first term he was head of his class in English subjects), and though to me he remains a broad-shouldered little boy, with a humorous face and a thatch of fair hair, common sense and calculation assure me that he is now middle-aged. But if his gift for shameless flattery of my sex persists, he must still be something of a lad!

"This exercise is disgracefully written, Roger," I once in what I trusted was a stern voice declared. "You must do it again, and you can begin now."

"Yes, darling," was the immediate reply. And then as he laboriously plied his pen—"You have ripping hair, Joy!" was his irrelevant but disarming remark after an appraising glance at me.

All the original "five" married, and now have grown-up sons and daughters. Some of the girls may even be grandmothers. But the only one of them from whom the changes and chances of this mortal life have not

separated me is the girl I have called Janie Meadows. We correspond. Whenever she is in London she comes to see me, and to her I am still "Joy." Like her mother before her, one of her grown-up daughters is training for the stage. I have sometimes wondered whether the quite considerable amount of acting I instituted at Silver Square had its effect on Janie's choice of a profession which her marriage made of comparatively short duration.

It was for the original "five" that I wrote my first volume of fairy plays, which have since been acted all over England and the Dominions, often with a total disregard of the small fee due to the author, and also of any hesitation on the part of the producers in altering them to suit their own convenience! But that is another story, and may be touched on later.

At the back of the Silver Square house there was a garden, small, but admirably suited for open-air plays. At either end of the terrace that ran the length of the house a short flight of steps led down to a lawn, the steps and the terrace admirable for "grouping" and for scenic effects. Here we rehearsed scenes from *As You Like It*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and once my own little fairy play, *The Dream Lady* (to mention a varied repertoire). I speak advisedly of "rehearsals," for the worst thunderstorm of the summer always broke on the day of the actual performance, and we were forced to give our visitors an inadequate "show" in the house!

But the picture which has dwelt longest in my memory and brings most vividly before me not only the youth of the Silver Square girls, but also of other children who have been intimately part of my life, was painted for me one winter, when just before Christmas we did Christina Rossetti's *Pageant of the Months*. An alteration in the

house, which entailed a staircase leading into a large room at a lower level than the passage from which it descended, made a perfect setting for the procession of the months. Clearly as though I were still watching those beautiful single figures following one another down the stairs, I see the children of long years ago, and hear each young voice reciting the verses appropriate to the special month she represented. The baby accents of "January" and "December" played by the five and six years old daughters of my schoolfellow May Cleverly, come back to me, mingled with the maturer voices of the older girls. I see Katherine as "April," small and dainty, in a white tunic, a bird's nest in her hand; Janie in a trailing robe of gorgeous colours as "July"; a lovely rose-clad "June." They all live young and radiant in my memory whatever Time may since have done to them.

I must have been very strong and well in those days, certainly very full of energy, for besides teaching at Silver Square every morning, I was writing, and going out a great deal. Though the Yellow Book set was scattered, it had given me many friends—of both sexes.

If as a young girl I knew few men, between the ages of thirty and forty (which I have come to think the best years of a woman's life) I knew a great many with whom I often dined, and either went on to some play or to a dance.

William Locke, the novelist, was one of the men I knew very well, and liked very much in those days. To dine with him was an experience in due appreciation of "the pleasures of the table," for he was an epicure, and as such, welcomed in most of the best-known dining places in London. It used to amuse me to see managers and waiters buzzing round him the moment we sat down at a table, offering dishes as though performing some

sacred rite, discussing wines with the solemnity that one associates with a religious ceremony.

All this would have bored me if Locke had not been something more and better than a *gourmet*. For all his rather elaborate manner, he was a shy man, and it was only when he knew people well that they discovered how witty he was, and how easy and delightful in conversation. Our friendship of many years lasted till his marriage (for quite early in my career I discovered this to be the psychological moment to part—gracefully, of course—with a man friend). He left London for a country home, and finally after the war lived on the Riviera till his death some years ago. He always sent me his novels as they appeared, and I retaliated with mine.

So quickly does a reputation fade nowadays that it is necessary to assure any young reader of this book (and I think I may assume that certain of the girls and boys who treat me with affection may so far honour me) that the novels of William Locke had an enormous pre-war vogue, and one that was not unjustified. They had many excellent qualities, of which perhaps the chief was *readableness*. Locke knew how to tell a story. His prose was easy, his dialogue good, often witty, and he created lovable characters. The best known of his stories is, I suppose, *The Beloved Vagabond*, which was dramatized and played at the Haymarket Theatre. But in my opinion his best work is contained in a volume of short stories called *The Joyous Adventures of Aristide Pujol*.

He knew well and greatly loved France; he spoke its language like a Frenchman, and he was always at his best in writing of that country and its people.

CHAPTER IX

THE "PLAYGOERS' PLAY"

WHILE I was teaching at Silver Square and leading the very full and busy life of alternate work and amusement I have indicated, I was still living at the Morpeth Terrace flat with three of my sisters.

It was the one who had left it on her marriage who by a chance remark was responsible for an event which ought to have had more effect on my life as a writer than it has in fact produced. In a letter to me one day she said, "Have you ever written a play? If so, why don't you send it to the St. James's Theatre?" and she enclosed a newspaper cutting giving an address.

As it happened, I *had* just written my first full-length play, and without knowing why plays were demanded (for the cutting evidently referred to some event in the theatrical world which I had missed), I packed it up and posted it before making the inquiries which presently explained the matter.

It seemed that after a dinner given by the Playgoers' Club, certain speakers complained in the presence of Beerbohm Tree and George Alexander, the two guests of honour, that actor-managers invariably went to certain well-known dramatists for their plays. There might be, argued these gentlemen, much dramatic talent which, because the same playwrights alone received commissions, had no chance to disclose itself. Whereupon the guests of the evening, having no doubt enjoyed an excellent dinner, replied, "Very well. Let us put it to the test. Form a committee from members of the Playgoers' Club, advertise a competition open to the

whole of Great Britain, and in the play you select, both of us will act for one matinée at a date later to be decided. The proceeds shall go to the Actors' Benevolent Fund." All unwittingly, therefore, I had sent my play to the committee that was formed soon after the dinner.

Some months later, when I had forgotten all about it, I received a letter one morning which, to my stupefaction, announced that my as yet unnamed play had been selected for the special matinée!

The fact that two such celebrated people as Tree and Alexander (neither of them as yet knighted) were to act in what immediately became known as the "Playgoers' Play" made for an enormous amount of publicity, and I was bewildered by all the fuss. It began a few hours after the family excitement over the letter, when I entered the classroom of a girls' school at Ealing where one morning a week I gave a lecture. The moment I appeared there was a storm of clapping from the thirty or forty girls in the class, and unaware that the announcement had already appeared in the papers, I was unable at first to account for such an enthusiastic welcome! When I reached home just before lunch it was to hear that several interviewers had called, and not finding me, had gathered some sort of "story" from my sisters. So for a time it went on; but as it was months before the date for the play's appearance was fixed, I had a long stretch of peace till the rehearsals began, and then not only no more peace, but often good cause to wish that it had never been accepted! Even before the rehearsals I had my first experiences of the unpleasant side of human nature, and by the end of the year I was to realize that materially, as well as in other and to me more important ways, the play had done me more harm than good.

Some weeks before *The Finding of Nancy* went into

rehearsal I was persuaded, very unwillingly, for I have always hated speaking in public, to take the chair at some meeting in connection with the Playgoers' Club. If I had at all realized the hostility, none the less powerful for being silent, which greeted me the moment I entered the room, wild horses would not have dragged me there! Foolishly, no doubt, it had never occurred to me that the unsuccessful competitors with their male and female supporters and belongings would form the greater part of the audience. But even if I *had* thought of it I should not have realized that ill-feeling would be extended towards me on account of my success. That it was, I knew very well when I faced that audience, for the wave of enmity that reached me was like a blast from some furnace. Nor was I any happier later at the St. James's Theatre, for I soon discovered that Alexander and Tree, no doubt regretting a rash offer, resented having to fulfil their promise of putting the chosen play on the stage and themselves acting in it. The latter part of the contract, indeed, was carried out in the letter but not in the spirit, for respectively they took the two smallest men's parts. So far as I remember, Tree appeared as a waiter with two words to utter, and Alexander as a foolish young man to whom one sentence was allotted. It was not playing the game certainly, but as nearly all the critics dealt very faithfully with them on this score, I need not dwell upon behaviour well calculated to wreck the play by making it farcical. It is pleasanter to think of the actor and the actress to whom it largely owed its success—Aubrey Smith and Lilian Braithwaite.

I was absolutely ignorant of the stage at the time. The only actor I knew was Jim Welch. I had never even been behind the scenes in any theatre, and I was so little acquainted with theatrical terms that when

one of the actresses at a rehearsal said, "You see, Miss Syrett, I've never had anything but *straight* parts before," I tried to look intelligent, but I hadn't an idea what she meant!

Without Aubrey Smith and Lilian Braithwaite, who were kindness itself, I don't think I could have got through three weeks of rehearsal without a breakdown, and I was only too thankful that (the choice of actresses being left to me) I agreed, though not without misgiving, to let Lilian play the chief part. Little as I knew of the stage, even *I* was aware that a well-known actress would be a "draw," and at that time Lilian Braithwaite was almost unknown, for her first part in London, in *Paolo and Francesca*, was a very small one. But she had come to see me at the flat to make her request, and was so pretty and charming as well as so desperately anxious for my consent, that my sisters, even less worldly wise than I, fell upon me after she had left with my promise to consider the matter, declaring that I ought to have given her the part at once!

To her and to Aubrey Smith I felt I could talk freely, for they were sympathetic, genuinely liked the play, and more than once rehearsed scenes in my sitting-room till they were sure they had got the note I wanted in to them.

I learnt a considerable amount about the hypocrisy of human beings during the rehearsal of that play of mine! As a general rule I felt too miserable and depressed to repel to suggestions that it was immoral, but once or twice I saw red, and up and spake with my tongue.

"You women have courage," a young man, who was playing a small part, in no pleasant tone remarked one day. "You say things we men wouldn't dare to say!"

"Except in plays like *The Belle of New York*, to which I should be ashamed to put my name!" I answered, being, I am glad to remember, for once too angry to feel uncomfortable.

In case anyone should wonder what all the fuss was about, I may as well say that in this year of grace such a play as *The Finding of Nancy* wouldn't stand a ghost of a chance on account of its mildness.

Here briefly was the theme. A man falling in love with a girl more lonely than in present-day conditions it is possible for a girl to be, cannot marry her because he has a dipsomaniac wife in an asylum. At first refusing, the girl suddenly finds she can no longer endure her solitary life, and accepts him as her lover. Though it is made quite clear that the man, genuinely in love, would marry her if he could, certain gentlemen on and off the stage affected to be so deeply shocked and outraged that one might have imagined chastity to be their outstanding virtue!

In my perturbation at the manner in which they expressed disapproval I asked Aubrey Smith if I had in ignorance written anything that could be construed as indecency. There was comfort in his emphatic reply that not a single word could be so interpreted—even by the malicious.

However, it was an experience, though not a pleasant one, to see the play rehearsed; and Alexander was such a good producer that I am glad to have watched him at work. He never lost his temper. There was no shouting, fussing, or fuming, for though his manner to *me* was far from encouraging, he was invariably quiet and courteous in his dealings with the actors and actresses.

"We'd better run straight through it to begin with," he said wearily at the first rehearsal. "I expect most of the exits and entrances are impossible."

THE "PLAYGOERS' PLAY"

He meant, I discovered, that I must have made people go on and off the stage without giving proper time for a change of dress and so forth.

When he found that there was nothing "impossible" in this respect, "Well, that, at least, is all right," he allowed. "Rather wonderful! How did you manage it?"

When I replied that I visualized the play and therefore knew where my characters would be at any given moment, he appeared surprised. . . . Later, he wanted me to cut out some gossip about the heroine in one of the parts, on the ground that no nice woman would say such things.

"But she isn't *meant* to be a nice woman," I objected, stating the obvious.

"Then I don't think Miss So-and-so can play the part!" he replied, righteous rebuke in his voice.

I should like to have asked him what actresses were for, but instead I inquired who *could*?

"That's for you to decide."

"Mabel Beardsley would probably be glad to do so," I said.

"Very well, get Mabel Beardsley."

I did, and was glad to have one more friend in the theatre.

But perhaps I have said enough to indicate why the rehearsals were not altogether pleasant experiences for me!

No doubt, as I have already remarked, it was a great bore for a busy man like Alexander to have to fulfil a promise made in a light-hearted moment nearly a year previously, and probably forgotten as soon as made. Most human beings are anything but logical, so it may have been too much to expect him to realize that *I* was not to blame!

One day, just before the actual performance, his wife, not then Lady Alexander, came to the theatre and sat through the whole three acts.

"What's the matter with this play?" she asked, turning to her husband. "I think it's charming!"

These were the first encouraging words I had heard from the management, and as they marked an immediate change in Alexander's manner, I was a little consoled.

But I was totally unprepared for what truly was an amazing success. Because of the publicity that had been given to the Playgoers' challenge and the response of the two most important actor-managers of the day, St. James's Theatre was packed, every one speculating upon the parts they would play, and eager to see them acting together.

I have already mentioned the parts they *did* take, and the laughter that greeted Tree's entrance as a waiter, though boisterous, was not altogether cordial.

Petrified with fright, I sat hidden behind the curtain of my box with Sissie Welch and two other friends, while my family, by arrangement, scattered itself in various parts of the theatre. Jim Welch was in Yorkshire on tour, and his telegram ran, "The eyes of Hull are upon you and Nancy."

But for me the whole afternoon was so absolutely unreal that I have decided to copy a letter written by one of her girl friends to a married sister who could not be present at the performance because her baby was ill. It is curious that she cannot remember from whom she received it, for apparently carried away by excitement the writer begins and ends abruptly, and the letter is not signed. But as a record of what seemed to *me* a fantastic dream it will serve:

THE "PLAYGOERS' PLAY"

I feel I must write at once and tell you all about Netta's play. I don't think if she is ordinarily careful that she will end her days in the workhouse!

I have never seen such a reception! It was splendid. As for me, I simply sobbed with excitement; it was too emotional.

Directly the curtain went up you felt the play would go. There was a swing and a verve about it. . . . Nancy was ripping; every one seemed to be doing their very best, and after each act the curtain was made to go up three times, the people would have it, and never was there a moment when you lost interest. . . . After the last act the audience rose en masse and yelled, shrieked, shouted, stamped, and nearly went mad. Then the curtain went up to show Netta and G. Alexander, and three times it went up. Then they yelled for a speech, and Netta came before the curtain, and I wondered if we should be home in time for breakfast. . . . I'm still so excited I don't know what to do. . . .

It was the version of an enthusiastic girl, of course, but she did not exaggerate the tumultuous reception of the play, for I still remember feeling stunned by it, and replying as though talking in my sleep to all the kind things people were saying to me, and at last, somehow or other, finding myself in a hansom being driven to Sissie Welch's flat in Gray's Inn for supper.

I remember Gerald Lawrence, who was then Lilian Braithwaite's husband, thanking me for giving his wife "her chance," and being altogether overwhelmed by the unexpectedness of everything, and everyone's enthusiasm. Beerbohm Tree had sent flowers to my box about the middle of the performance, with a note: "*Many congratulations. How well it is going!*" And I remember, too, Sissie Welch turning to me towards

the end of the first act to whisper, "*It's all right, Netta! You've got the house!*"

I suppose that evening was one of the happiest in my life. Overwhelming success is as intoxicating as "looking upon the wine when it is red," and though I was innocent of physical drunkenness, when Sissie, knowing I must be exhausted, put me on the sofa after supper and forbade me to talk, I was in the corresponding mental stage of blissful intoxication as I listened to the others going over details of the afternoon's triumph.

I am glad to have had a few hours of exultation when all the future was rosy, and everything seemed possible. For it didn't last, even though, with one exception, I had a wonderful press, the best, and to me most gratifying tribute, coming from Max Beerbohm, then dramatic critic to the *Morning Post*. The exception to the chorus of praise came from Clement Scott, whose article in the *Daily Telegraph* I should have found, and at the time, indeed, *did* find, exceedingly funny, little dreaming of the harm its ludicrous and hypocritical invective would do to a part of my life unconnected with the stage, and very important to me.

But even while people were assuring me that my fortune was made, and in spite of all the praise accorded to a simple and necessarily amateurish play which happened to strike a note then new to playgoers, I had a presentiment that what it promised would never be fulfilled.

The first check came with a disappointing and for long mysterious interview with George Alexander the day after the newspaper reports on *The Finding of Nancy*. In response to a telegram from him, I went to the St. James's Theatre and was ushered into his private room, where he sat already dressed and made up for the *matinée*

of *Paolo and Francesca*, in which he played the part of Malatesta, Tyrant of Rimini.

My sisters had been jubilant when the telegram came, certain that it meant his acceptance of the play for a run. What else *could* it mean? they not unnaturally argued.

When utterly bewildered I returned, I could only tell them that he had seemed embarrassed, had merely repeated all the congratulations I had already received from him after the *matinée* two days previously, and that when I had thanked him all over again there was nothing left for me but to get up and go!

Months later I heard that he had intended to put the play on for a run of afternoon performances, but at the last moment (presumably too late to prevent me from keeping the appointment) he had been dissuaded, on the ground that to do so would be to "sully the purity of the St. James's Theatre!" So perhaps Clement Scott's silly diatribe had its influence after all—and to compare an important with a very much less important matter, when one remembers that after Oscar Wilde's conviction his name was erased on the play-bills outside St. James's Theatre, the possibility is heightened.

I was disappointed, of course, but I was soon to be dealt a much harder blow, for here my affections were involved and very deeply wounded. I think it was the mother of a girl who came to some of my classes at Silver Square and presumably had read Clement Scott's article who wrote to complain of the bad influence I must exercise, and the lady I have called Miss Stuart tearfully asked me to resign my post.

She was a kind, affectionate, but, I must add, not a very courageous woman. In her place I hope I should have replied to the somewhat unintelligent writer of

the letter that, if she feared the influence of her daughter's teacher, there was nothing to prevent her from removing the girl. Instead, though I was a personal friend, and she knew her correspondent's alarm to be absurd, she was afraid to act on her convictions, and though my friendship with her was not for long impaired, I left the little group I had taught for several years, as much, I think, to their distress as to mine.

In addition, I was soon to discover what a heart-breaking experience everything connected with the theatre can be—and generally *is*. But apart from this, changed circumstances in my own life eventually made it impossible to go on writing for the stage. My father's death, the breaking up of our home and the disappearance of the comfortable financial background I had hitherto known, forbade me to indulge in the gamble of play-writing. A novel had become for me a "sure thing," a play merely an off-chance—a risk which I couldn't afford to take.

But I still believe that if I could have gone on writing for the stage long enough to acquire the necessary technique, I might have succeeded, for having once been able to hold the attention of a theatre full of people, there seems no reason why I should not have managed to do so again. Be that as it may, and, anyhow, it doesn't now matter, it was with a wry smile that I read an article some little time ago in which the writer stated that I had once received a thousand pounds for a play chosen in a competition! I did not, of course, get one farthing out of it, and, moreover—though this at the time was the least of its consequences to me—I lost a very generous salary.

I can think of only one good thing that may be traced to that "success." Indirectly, and one or two years later, it led to a friendship I should have been

sorry to miss. When I met William Somerset Maugham, his first play, *The Man of Honour*, had just been produced, and his future fame still awaited him. Of such a much-discussed man it is unnecessary to say anything here, except that he is still my friend.

CHAPTER X

STILL THEATRICAL

TO think, or to write, about any subject, as I long ago discovered, is immediately to find other things connected with it hitherto forgotten. Only yesterday the chance discovery of a book I haven't seen for many years reminds me that *The Finding of Nancy* was not the only play of mine to be acted in the St. James's Theatre! This one, however, aroused no controversy, for it was a simple play for children which I called *White Magic* and produced myself.

The "book" I have just mentioned is really an elaborate souvenir programme to commemorate an entertainment in aid of the "Fresh Air Fund" to give slum children a country holiday. I will quote a few lines from its preface:

When an entertainment by children for the children's charity was first thought of, Mr. George Alexander most kindly placed his splendid theatre at our disposal. With the kind help of Mr. Vivian Reynolds, his stage manager, we have been able to avail ourselves of all the resources in the way of scenery, and practically everything we have wanted in the way of stage appointments has been found in the store-house of theatrical accessories within the walls of the St. James's Theatre. The programme begins with the Fairy Play White Magic, by Netta Syrett. . . . The scene represents the outside of the witch's hut in the wood. . . .

A list of the characters follows, and among them

are Marie Löhr and a young actor of the time—Robert Bottomley.

... The music to White Magic has been composed by Dalhousie Young, and the dances have been arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Louis D'Egville. . . . Miss Kate Syrett has designed all the dresses.

I suppose it was one of the organizers of the entertainment who asked me to produce a fairy play in aid of the fund, though I have completely forgotten how I became involved in the affair. My leading lady, Marie Löhr, then a girl about fourteen, made a charming princess, and Robert Bottomley as the fairy prince was also excellent. These two must have had some previous stage experience, for under Marie Löhr's name in the cast I see (*By courtesy of Mr. Arthur Bouchier*), and under Bottomley's (*By courtesy of Messrs. Harrison and Maude*), but all the rest of the actors and actresses were amateurs. I recall with amusement young Bottomley's surprise when I insisted that he should repeat the actual words I had written for his part instead of others, more or less like them, which he seemed to think would do just as well.

"Miss Syrett is so particular!" I overheard him remark one day. "I've never had to learn my lines word for word before—except Shakespeare." This as an afterthought. I then explained that though I might not write quite so well as Shakespeare, I had really taken a certain amount of trouble over the prince's "lines," and preferred them to his garbled version. He was quite amiable about it, and I had the satisfaction on "the night"—or rather the "afternoon"—of hearing *my* words instead of his!

Percy (later Canon) Dearmer's children, Geoffrey

and Christopher, then little boys, had parts, and of the two youngest members of the cast, both of them pretty children of five years old, one was my niece, Barbara Buttar, the other Marguerite Luck, later a member of the post-war Russian ballet. These two babies, respectively the butterfly and dragonfly fairies, had a *succès fou* from an audience mostly feminine, when they trotted on to the stage, though Alexander and various other actors in the stalls outdid the women in their ecstasy at the sight of them. The Dryad in the play, however, Bertha Selous, a girl with a lovely voice, may have wished they had been a little less obedient to my instructions during rehearsals. I had told them to look up into her face when, seated on a fallen log, with a child on either side of her, she sang to them. They obeyed implicitly, and the effect was charming, but afterwards she laughingly complained that they lay so firmly on her chest, "like two fat puppies," that she could scarcely get her breath for the high notes of her song.

I remember, after the performance, George Alexander on his knees before the two babies as they sat in someone's dressing-room, little bare legs stretched out straight in front of them, munching sponge cakes and gazing with placid indifference at the gentleman lavishing endearments upon them!

That Charity matinée was interesting for the appearance of two, at least, of the performers who—children then—have since become well known, Marie Löhr (the daughter of Kate Bishop) as an actress, and Myra Hess as a pianist. After the play there was a concert on the stage, at which Myra Hess, then I suppose about fourteen, and a pupil at the Royal Academy of Music, played (as I read in the souvenir book) "the last two movements of Mendels-

sohn's Concerto in G minor with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Something that happened a week or two before the performance, in which my training as a teacher stood me in good stead, also remains a very clear and amusing memory for me.

Many of the children I needed for fairies and goblins in *White Magic* were acting at the time in a production of *The Tempest* at His Majesty's, and the lady who trained them for that play was supposed to rehearse them for mine also. The "goblins" (who came from a different training school) had already been taught their parts by me in the hall we used for rehearsals. But as time went on and I heard nothing of the fairies, I began to get anxious, and finally decided to go to the theatre to see what was happening. Though these children had no speaking parts in the play, I knew that an effective situation would be spoilt unless they knew their cues well enough to come on at the right moment. The doorkeeper admitted me when I stated my business, and I descended to a huge room which must have been under the stage, for, sunk into a deep hole in the floor, was the ship which in the first scene of *The Tempest* was shown tossing in the storm.

But the noise and confusion of the shipwreck scene as it was presented every night was nothing compared with the midday pandemonium below the stage.

Crowds of children completely out of hand were rushing about shouting and laughing, and in the midst of them (though what he was doing there I have no idea) was Beerbohm Tree, frantically ejaculating as the little devils rushed along the edge of the pit in which the ship lay, in his well-known curious voice, "*For God's sake, children, keep away from the hole!*"

After some trouble I found a distracted woman who seemed to be rehearsing half a dozen groups of *supers* at the same time, and through the tumult suggested that she should let *me* rehearse those for *White Magic*. She looked at me doubtfully. But when I called out, "All *White Magic* children this way," and about twenty of them, with joyful yells, surrounded me, she gave a shrug of relief and left me to my fate. Having reduced them to silence, I taught them all they had to do in ten minutes, for they were wonderfully quick and clever. They never had another rehearsal, and on "the day" their performance was excellent.

As a spectacle, the beauty of *White Magic* owed much to the dresses arranged for it by my sister Kate, who has a genius for design, as those who much later witnessed a *Pageant of the Months* given at the Albert Hall, which she dressed, have cause to know.

White Magic was the first of several children's plays I produced at various times and for various charities, and it was the success of these that gave me the notion of starting a real Children's Theatre. But it was not till 1913 that this idea to some extent took practical form.

Before I leave the subject of the theatre I will speak of two out of the many "near things" which, as I suppose, every dramatist knows occur, as it seems, for the sole purpose of raising hopes sky-high, only to dash them to the lowest depths.

Some of the men and women of my generation will certainly remember Miss Darragh as an actress, and in my opinion an excellent one. I knew her fairly well at one time, for she had been my fellow-guest at a country house. But before this I had seen her several times on the London stage, and had admired her acting. After

that meeting in the country she read a play of mine, liked it, and when some time later, with a little money at her disposal, she decided to go into management, mine was the play she intended to open with, when the provincial tour for which she was engaged should be over.

The company was at Southampton when she invited me to stay with her for a day or two, so that we might discuss it, and arrange the cast. There was a heat wave at the time, and though I forget what play they were giving, I know the theatre was almost empty when on the second evening I went to see it. Miss Darragh's leading man was Courtenay Thorpe. I knew him slightly, and had once seen him as Oswald in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, which he played with horrible effect. A most courteous and gentle-natured man, I always admired his pluck, handicapped as he was by a facial disfigurement (the result of an accident), which made of him a pathetically *macabre* figure.

We, that is to say all the women in the cast, returned after the performance to a very late supper at Miss Darragh's rooms, and for some reason that evening remains in my memory like a brilliantly lit picture. We were seated at the table in a room lighted by candles. The windows were wide open, but the night was so still that their flames burnt steadily without a flicker, and the room was sweet with the scent from an avenue of lime trees in full flower in the road below. The perfume kept drifting in warm gusts through the open windows into the room, where we sat talking till two o'clock in the morning. It was good, interesting talk too, for these actresses were intelligent, recognizing that other things beside "the Stage" exist, and may even be of more importance than theatrical rivalries and jealousies.

I left Southampton next morning with a very pleasant memory of charming young women and the exciting prospect of having my play produced in the autumn. But when the time came I found that Miss Darragh had decided to open with one written by the son of an actor with a well-known name, a name she thought likely to prove a "draw."

That play ran for less than a week.

"Very well. Now we'll start rehearsing Netta Syrett's *The Tenth Day*," said Miss Darragh.

"Impossible, my dear lady," returned her business manager, "you've run through every penny already!"

She had, indeed, been recklessly extravagant over the production of the failure—and there was no more to be said, but much to be *felt* by me!

I lost sight of Miss Darragh for some years. I think she went either to America or to South Africa—perhaps to both countries. But years later, when I was in Oxford, I caught sight of her name on a playbill one day, and went to see her in *The Angel in the House*. The man she was acting with was evidently gagging in such a particularly amusing way that, abandoning all attempt at self-control, she laughed and laughed, and could not stop laughing. Fortunately her hilarity was infectious, and the house, crowded with undergraduates, *rocked* in sympathy, even though what she was trying to say was unintelligible. I half thought of going to the stage-door to ask for her after the performance, but finally deciding that she would have forgotten me, I did not do so. Some months later, when I heard that the poor little woman had died of cancer, I was sorry not to have spoken to her once again. She was gay and plucky, and such a good actress that she deserved more success. But in common with many

other people of ability, her judgment was not her strong point, and her lack of it betrayed her.

The following letter refers to another disappointment.

I had read a play to Laurence Irving, who at the time was engaged in some theatrical venture with Otho Stuart. He had not only been charming to me but, as I could see, really impressed by my play, and I had left his house in Gilston Road full of hope that two or three days later was to be dashed.

My dear Miss Syrett,

After carefully considering your play, and much as I liked it, my pocket (alas!) refuses to justify me in attempting to introduce it to the public. As I told you, The Master, which had in it a strong ingredient of mirth, proved a financial loss to me, and I am afraid that your play, with its harrowing end, would stand a yet smaller chance of "drawing" under the same conditions. If I were a capitalist, an Otho Stuart, or anything approaching it, I would be eager that a play so well written and interesting should not languish away from the Stage; but as things are, my admiration and prepossessions have to subordinate themselves to the £ s. d. Thanking you very much for having let me hear the play in its much improved form and wishing every success to your new novel and your uncompleted play,

Believe me,

Sincerely yours,

LAURENCE IRVING

This letter is not dated, but I think it was written shortly before his tragic death. It will be remembered that he and his wife were drowned when the *Empress of Ireland* sank in the estuary of the River St. Lawrence,

not, I think, any great length of time after their marriage. Some time previously I had met in Paris the sister of Lady Irving, and I remember lunching with her at her club, her other guest being an actress introduced to me as Miss Mabel Hackney. Some weeks later I heard that, unknown at the time to our hostess, this lady had that very morning married her nephew Laurence!

One other thing in connection with Laurence Irving very vividly comes back to me. On the top of a book-case in the room in which I read my play to him there stood a bust of Sir Henry, and though Laurence did not really resemble him at all, likeness is such a strange elusive thing that as I looked up on coming to the end of an act, for a moment his expression so exactly recalled that great actor that I exclaimed, suddenly enough to make him laugh, "Oh, you *are* so like your father!"

The mention of Sir Henry Irving reminds me of a certain unforgettable evening just after the Boer War, when I saw him in the play *Waterloo*. It was an invitation performance given by him to the newly returned Volunteers, and I owed my presence in the Lyceum, packed from floor to ceiling with soldiers, to a journalist friend of mine, a woman who was reporting for her paper, and though I am sure she had no right to take me, she managed (as she always *did* manage to do whatever she liked) to smuggle me in.

Even before the curtain went up I was thrilled by the spectacle of hundreds and hundreds of men in khaki—I think we must have been the only two women in the house—and to hear them cheering when Irving appeared. But better than his acting in the play, I remember his speech after the performance, when in

response to a hurricane of applause he walked down to the footlights and addressed the men. There was no one like Irving for *style*! It was that—his poise, his distinction of manner—that set him apart from any actor, dead or living, within my own remembrance.

CHAPTER XI

ITALY AND THE RIVIERA

THE *Finding of Nancy* was produced in May 1898, and by the end of that year, in consequence, I suppose, of all the unpleasant experiences it brought me, I was thoroughly run down and ill. My father came to the rescue and gave me and my sister Nell a holiday, and together we saw Italy for the first time. For me it was only one of many later visits, but that was for the future.

We went first to Rome, and in spite of being intensely interested, I was not happy there, nor have I ever been happy in that city, though since then I have stayed there several times. There are certain places that seem to affect me adversely, and wonderful and beautiful though it is, Rome is one of them. When later we went on to Florence, the moment I set foot in that lovely city I felt at home, in a friendly atmosphere that suited me.

But of course Rome was a great experience. We spent Christmas there, and were immensely amused by the preaching children in the church of Ara Coeli on the Capitol. The sight of the dramatically gesticulating little creatures reciting speeches (which they had, of course, learnt by heart) reminded me of a book I loved in my childhood, *The Improvisatore*, by Hans Andersen. It belonged to my grandmother, and from it in my very early youth I gathered all my ideas of Italy long before I ever saw that lovely country. It is a romantic novel—the only novel, I believe, Hans Andersen ever wrote—and in it there is a description

of this very ceremony. I wonder if it is still performed, or whether the Fascist State discourages such charming survivals?

The last time I was in Italy Mussolini's régime had only just begun, and, outwardly—at least in the south—its effect was not noticeable. Everything remained very much as it had been when, years previously, Nell and I were in Rome. No one expected a train to arrive anywhere in time, letters were erratically delivered, the churches were still dirty and flea-infested, and the working people, though charming, could never be depended upon to do anything without interminable delay. But it did not matter. The *dolce far niente* life was delightful, and it was a relief to feel one need neither hurry nor worry. There was no efficiency then—and now I should dread to go back to a country I love for fear of finding far too much!

Another reminder of the glamorous *Improvvisatore*, my childhood's best-loved book, came with a visit I paid to the Catacombs in Rome. Nell had wisely refused to go, and if I had been sensible I should have been equally firm, for claustrophobia is one of my comparatively few nervous obsessions (to this day I cannot travel in the Tube). But I was asked to accompany an hotel acquaintance very anxious to "do the catacombs," and rather unwillingly I consented. But no sooner had we descended into one of the narrow tunnel-like passages than I was sick with fright, and began to imagine all kinds of horrors. Suppose the guide, presumably the only person who knew the way, should suddenly have a fit, or even die? We should be left wandering for ever through that awful labyrinth! Till then I had been interested in the Early Christians and wanted to see the palm branches and fish symbols cut on their berth-like graves. Now

I hated them for having lured me into this terrifying place, black as night in spite of the tapers we all carried, and so low that one had to crouch as one walked.

A scene from the *Improvvisatore* came with sudden vividness to my mind as we moved in single file through those low galleries. The painter Federigo takes the hero, as a child, into one of the catacombs and drops the string which, fastened at the entrance and unwound as they walked, is the only means of finding their way back. The candle he carries goes out, and he and the child have thrown themselves on the ground in despair, when moving his hands mechanically in the sand on the floor, the boy finds the thread between his fingers. . .

I don't know how many years it was since I had read a description which as a child used to hold me tense with horror, but its very wording came back to me that afternoon. Quite ridiculous, of course; but I shall never forget my thankfulness to emerge into a "chapel" where high overhead there was a round hole, through which one saw the sky and the blessed light of day!

When we emerged from the Catacombs my companion and I went into a café for a much-needed cup of tea, and were therefore rather late in returning to the hotel, where I found my sister, who is even more addicted than I am to absurd imaginings, nearly frantic. Someone had told her that not long previously a party of Americans had lost their way in the Catacombs and were not rescued for days (or hours—I forget which). My return just prevented her, I think, from rushing downstairs to organize a search party!

From Rome we went to Florence, and after some weeks in that lovely city, Nell went home, and as a

result of a letter from Ella D'Arcy I finished my holiday at Mentone.

Some years before the winter of which I am writing, I had paid my first visit to the Riviera, where I stayed first with the Collyers, two girl friends of mine whose father, afterwards Archdeacon of Malta, was then English Chaplain at Cannes. Later in the season my father and mother came out and I joined them at the Beau Site hotel. Only those who, like me, knew the Riviera long ago, can realize the contrast between "then" and "now." No motor vehicles, public or private, dashed along the roads by the sea, nor had the coast-line then been spoilt by over-building.

On the promenade at Cannes in the morning one might watch a "fashion parade" of the most beautifully dressed women in Europe, while a smartly uniformed band played the gayest of airs under a sky that to my doubtless flattering memory was always blue! But it was my first taste of the South, and I was intoxicated with the colour and fragrance of flowers and of flowering trees I had never before seen in the open air—mimosa—camellias—orange-blossom. And, moreover, I was myself young and out for amusement, of which there was much to be had at the Beau Site hotel in those days.

The brothers Doherty, famous tennis players later, but even then excellent at the game, were at the hotel the winter I was there, and their play was worth watching. One of them was also a wonderfully good dancer as well as exceedingly nice-looking. The Collyers and I privately called him "the Wyvern," the name suggested by a nonsense verse in a collection of amusing idiocies by a forerunner of Hilaire Belloc, whose *Bad Child's Book of Beasts* owes something, I think, to the

writer of "The Wyvern." Here, as I remember it, is the little imbecility:

"The Wyvern is a bird we see
Who sings his song on every tree.
The Wyvern is a bird we hear
Who says his say in every ear.
Though humble, we must not despise.
God made him. He has purple eyes."

It was to the colour of his eyes, and not to his humility (though that may have existed), that the younger Doherty owed his nickname.

"She's actually danced with the Wyvern!" exclaimed a girl staying with the Collyers in a tone as awestruck as though the King of England had been my dancing partner the previous evening. Then she sighed, and added, turning to me, "You can't surpass *that*!" From which it may be gathered that the girls of my generation were considerably more impressed than they are to-day by the other sex (unless, indeed, they happen to be film stars)!

At the Beau Site that winter of happy memory were several members of the Russian nobility, among them Anastasia of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, the Czar's aunt, and her brother the Grand Duke Michael, who had much to do with the golf club at the time.

The post-war Riviera is a travesty of what I remember of its charm and gaiety. With a car (ironically enough the very conveyance that has largely spoilt the coast towns) it is still possible to find great beauty in the hinterland, among the mountains; and certainly Monaco retains its loveliness as of old. Nevertheless, I don't think I want to see the Riviera again!

But even a good many years later, on my second visit, the coast was as lovely as ever. It was after the war that it so deteriorated, and it was when I was

there two years ago that I made up my mind never to return.

It was Ella D'Arcy, as I have said, who suggested that I should join her at Mentone, and was therefore responsible for my second visit. She was at a villa there belonging to her friends the Williamsons, a husband and wife who collaborated in travel stories, and though I had not met them, they sent a message asking me to be their paying guest for a month or two. I agreed, and found their villa, the "Palmier," at the Garavan end of Mentone, an enchanting little place. It had a ledge-like garden, carpeted with violets, and a big climbing heliotrope in full bloom flung its scented branches over the rock against which the villa was built. The garden seemed always drenched in sunshine, and after months of idleness I began to enjoy writing in the little flowery paradise, and though in some respects my visit was not an unmixed success, I got through a considerable amount of work, and revelled in the warmth and sunshine of an exceptionally good season in point of weather.

One thing that occurred while I was under the Williamsons' roof stands out in my memory rather melodramatically. Some time before my arrival they had made the acquaintance of an American couple who were staying at the most expensive of all the expensive hotels in the town. Before I met these people I had heard enthusiastic accounts from my host and hostess of the beauty of the wife, and of the delightful straightforward, simple friendliness of her husband, a man, they told me, very much her senior, but devoted to her, and to their little son, a child about six years of age.

They had been asked to dinner for a date which fell

about a week after my arrival. They came, and certainly the woman justified Mrs. Williamson's praise of her personal appearance. Beautifully dressed, tall and elegant, she had the most wonderful red-gold hair, perfect features, a lovely complexion, and looked about five-and-twenty. The man, old enough to be her father, and addressed by her as Pa, had been described to me by Mr. Williamson as "something of a rough diamond, self-made, but so honest about it!"

And indeed at dinner we heard much from "Pa" about his early struggles, and how, because he had always trusted in God, his deals had gone through. Now, thanks to the Almighty's concern on his behalf, he was able to give "Girlie" and his little son a happy time. For Girlie had been a "wonderful little woman" through their years of poverty. There were tears in his eyes as he spoke of the devoted wife Girlie had always been to him, and the Williamsons were greatly touched.

"Pa" dwelt much on the necessity for being God-fearing in a world too much given to forgetting its Creator, and it was apparently only I who noticed that, as dinner progressed and wine rather freely flowed, his anecdotes became less and less pious in character. At the end of the evening, after Girlie had been helped into her sable coat and with "Pa's" arm about her had stepped into a waiting carriage and driven off, the Williamsons vied with one another in praise of their guests—praise in which Ella D'Arcy with apparent enthusiasm joined. But even then—I wondered. Had I christened her "Goblin Ella" for nothing? I was silent, and perhaps my silence was provocative.

"What do *you* think of them?" demanded Mrs. Williamson a little aggressively.

"Well, as you've asked me, I think they are a couple

of adventurers," I returned, and was immediately overwhelmed with reproaches, Mrs. Williamson declaring she thought it sad that I, the youngest of the party, should be so suspicious. What grounds had I for such a shocking accusation?

"None—except that I happen to be rather a good judge of character," I replied somewhat shortly, for (I may as well tell the truth) I had already discovered that the Williamsons and I were not kindred spirits.

Some weeks later they may have wished they had accepted my warning, for by a trick practised, as it was afterwards discovered, so often as to have become easy to "Pa," Mr. Williamson's balance at the bank was diminished by five hundred pounds before this simple-minded "rough diamond" and his accomplice disappeared from Mentone. Several years later, when I was again on the Riviera, this time at Cannes, I saw and, in spite of the lapse of time, recognized "Girlie" coming out of an hotel with a man who bore no resemblance to "Pa"!

The advantages of having definite work to do are many and various, and before I left Mentone I discovered a new one. The fact that the Williamsons were also writers prevented me from troubling very much about the rather strained relationship that existed between us. They too had settled hours for work, and we saw so little of one another that it was easy enough to talk amiably on the surface when we met at meals.

This seems the moment to record my amazement at the rapidity with which Mrs. Williamson's pencil moved across the writing block she held on her knee as she worked at her novels. I used to watch with stupefaction that never pausing pencil (for she could write anywhere, and in any circumstances). It behaved like a machine,

covering page after page without ceasing. I often thought of it while I struggled with a sentence, utterly unable to fashion it as I wished, and—at the end of a morning had perhaps two pages to show for all my labour!

I never read any of them, but her books were popular, and I think she made a good deal of money. Anyhow, I saw little either of her or her husband, and if I wanted a companion for a walk, Ella (who never did a stroke of work!) was always available, and none the less amusing, for her ability to run with the hare and hold with the hounds.

So I accepted the situation for what it was—a business arrangement that in certain ways suited me, enjoyed the garden and the scenery, and finally returned to England very much better in health and spirits.

CHAPTER XII

ENTER "PETER" BY WAY OF *THE DREAM GARDEN*

A YEAR or two after we had moved from Ashley Gardens to Morpeth Terrace, the great Cathedral our flat overlooked was, outwardly at least, finished, and the seminarists training for the priesthood, of whom "Peter," later my brother-in-law, was one, used often to walk up and down the flat roof covering one of the buildings connected with it, watched by the mischievous eyes of my younger sisters.

The sight of them in their black cassocks, devoutly reading as they paced the roof, suggested to these young imbeciles a game called "teasing the priests" (anyone in a cassock being a "priest"). A hand-glass quickly flashed from the window caused the youths to raise startled eyes, but before they could determine whence the light came, the girls had ducked out of sight.

Needless to say, this infantile game was carried on for the sheer amusement of seeing the puzzled faces of the young ecclesiastics. The last thing they expected or wished was to meet any or even one of them. But fate willed it otherwise, and I was the instrument of its decree. It was I who most unwillingly introduced to my sister Nell "T"—not then of *Punch*, but a penniless young man already, I think, beginning to agree with Cardinal Bourne's verdict that he had no vocation for the priesthood.

In those days, in addition to novels, I wrote a great deal for children, and the idea of editing a Christmas book which should contain stories by people who, in

my opinion, had a special gift for interesting the youngest generation was one I was anxious to carry out.

It was not to be a commercial venture, and though I made this quite clear to the men and women I asked for contributions, all of them very generously sent me stories or verses. Then came the difficulty of getting the miscellany printed. It was John Baillie, the eventual publisher of *The Dream-Garden*, who told me of a young man called Joseph Thorp, then making a special study of the art of beautiful printing. I found him in the shop that still exists opposite to the Cathedral, a shop full of church candlesticks and figures of saints, which then housed the "Arden Printing Press." Joseph called Peter received the idea of the book with all the excited eagerness which those who know "T" may readily imagine, and while I talked to him I thought, "If Nell sees this attractive young man she'll fall in love with him. . . . She shall not see him!"

This was sisterly prudence—not cattishness! By that time I knew that Joseph Thorp had fifteen pounds between him and starvation when he was turned out into the world with no training of any kind to fit him for earning a living as a layman. But, of course, prudence was vanquished. Nell asked questions about *The Dream Garden*, for which she had drawn many pictures. Where was it being printed? By whom? And finally one day insisted upon going into the "Catholic shop" with me.

The moment we left it she exclaimed, "What a beautiful young man! Why didn't you tell me about him?" So the mischief was done. "Felix culpa," as "T," soon to be re-christened "Peter" (Peter Pan being then in the early years of its interminable run), puts it in his book of reminiscences, *Friends and Adventures*.

ENTER "PETER" BY WAY OF *THE DREAM GARDEN*

After two or three weeks, during which he was more often in than out of our flat, he and Nell were engaged.

My father, naturally dubious, and unaware of the tumultuous energy of his prospective son-in-law, made him promise not to marry till he was sure of a certain specified yearly sum. In a few months this was attained, and early in the August of that year Nell and he were married. I was in Paris at the time, so I will speak later of their wedding as it was described to me in letters from home. But as one of their wedding presents was a specially bound copy of *The Dream Garden*—the book which led to their meeting—and also because I am rather proud of my list of contributors, I will say a few words about it now.

Its charming cover, designed by Nell, represents a fairy child standing in a chariot composed of flowers, driving ribbon-harnessed lambs tandem-fashion, the "leader" guided by a little pierrot waving a bouquet. The first story, which gives its name to the volume and was written by me, has a delightful coloured picture by way of illustration of the "Dream Garden" when the "Ivory Gate" has swung open and the dreamers enter their paradise. This also was Nell's work.

Of well-known people whose names appear in the list of writers under the page headed *Contents*, I see Fiona Macleod, Hilaire Belloc, Alfred Noyes, Evelyn Sharp, E. Nesbit, Mary Mann, Margaret Deland, Hamilton Fyfe, Norman Gale, Arthur Ransome among the writers. Of the illustrators I have already mentioned my sister, and close to her on the list there is the name of that fine artist, Glyn Philpot (who died only the other day), Helen Stratton, Mary Corbett, Dora Curtis, the three latter well-known artists and my sisters' friends.

Looking back upon this venture I marvel at my boldness in asking such distinguished people to contribute

to a more or less private venture which had no chance of commercial success. When I wrote to Fiona Macleod I had no idea that "she" was William Sharp—or rather a *part* of him—if one accepts dual personality! I never knew William Sharp, but for a certain reason he will ever be associated in my mind with Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna*, the play banned by the Censor, and acted (under the auspices of a private company, I suppose) at a little theatre in Bayswater. The place was packed. There was only one exit, and all the rules that obtained in an ordinary theatre as precautions against fire had been disregarded.

The scene set on the tiny stage represented the interior of a tent, and behind a table, on which stood two lighted candles, there was some Oriental drapery. My sight in those days was phenomenally keen, and though I was as far from the stage as one *could* be in such a small auditorium, I saw to my horror two brown rings behind the candles becoming larger and larger. I dared not utter a word for fear of causing a panic, and sat with clenched hands, waiting. To my unutterable relief, just as I was telling myself that in another moment the drapery would burst into flames, a big man in the front row, whom later I heard was William Sharp, leapt on to the stage and blew out the candles. I think he may have averted a terrible disaster.

But it was "Fiona Macleod" who wrote me the following very kind letter in reply to mine, asking for a contribution:

11th Sept.

Dear Miss Syrett,

I hope to send to you for your Dream Garden, and soon, a prose narrative entitled "How the First Crows were Black and the First Doves White." I may be able to send you a poem also, but am not certain (if so it would

ENTER "PETER" BY WAY OF *THE DREAM GARDEN*

probably be one called "Where the Forest Murmurs"). Will your book be out this autumn-winter season? I ask because I would want to include the poem in a forthcoming volume of verse of my own, that may be published in December, or may be held over. I do not know yet.

Believe me,

Very truly yours,

FIONA MACLEOD

I don't remember why eventually the story I received was "How the Son of Pendragon made Knighthood," instead of that mentioned in the letter. And as I didn't get the poem, his book must have been published in December.

It was wonderful also of the poet Alfred Noyes to let me have part of his charming poem "The Forest of Wild Thyme." Certainly he was not so well known thirty and more years ago as he is to-day, but a blush rises, or *should* rise, to my cheek when I remember that in writing to thank him I dared to suggest that a certain verse wasn't as good as the rest. I cherish the letter in which, instead of the snub I deserved, he wrote to compliment me upon my "literary acumen"—for it was, he said, that particular verse with which he himself was dissatisfied. He removed it! But, after all, it is only the second-rate "little people" who are conceited, and Alfred Noyes could afford to be generous.

Perhaps the most charming and amusing fairy story in the book is one called "Fuff," and the note beneath it runs as follows:

Years ago when I first knew and loved "Fuff," the author used to read it to her little daughter. Now the little daughter is grown up, and in memory of her dead mother she has given me this story for The Dream Garden.

The writer was Christina Denning, my psychic friend of long ago, and the "little daughter," who was at St. Hugh's College, Oxford, when in my character of editor I wrote this note, is now Mrs. Herbert Richardson Silver Medallist, (of the Royal Society of Arts, B.A., F.R.Hist.S., F.R.S.A., to mention a few of her honours), whose delightful lectures on the social life of various periods in History are enjoyed by audiences all over England. She is also becoming well known as a broadcaster; and those to whom mysterious problems dealing with Time make a strong appeal may be interested to hear that while she was still a girl at St. Hugh's College, of which Miss Moberley and Miss Jourdain were successively the Principals, she was the first to undertake research work in connection with the strange experiences of these ladies at Versailles. The result of that work, with the later research carried on for ten years in Paris by Miss Moberley and Miss Jourdain themselves, is now in safe keeping at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and in spite of recent attempts to dispose of the story as a "pathetic illusion" will carry conviction to future scientists.

On the whole I think I had a right to be proud of my *Dream Garden*, which by now should be a rarity worth the attention of book collectors, if only for the names of some of the contributors! There cannot be many copies in existence, for only a limited number were published by the afore-mentioned John Baillie, of One Prince's Terrace, Hereford Road, London, W., in the year 1905.

CHAPTER XIII

PARIS

SEVERAL years before the last wedding in the family we left our country home in Sussex and took a house at Walton-on-Thames. Warnham Place was lovely and delightful, but its upkeep was terribly expensive, and my father must have lost a great deal of money over it. At River House there was only a very large garden to manage, instead of the many acres of land he had to deal with at Warnham Place.

The family, moreover, was scattered. Three of the sisters had homes of their own. My eldest brother was married and settled in practice as a doctor at Nayland in Suffolk, two of the other boys were in South Africa, and the only one regularly at home was my youngest sister Elsie. Jack, the youngest of us all, was still at school, coming back only at holiday times.

Apart from expense, we no longer needed a large place, and I am glad to remember how well River House suited my father's taste. I think he was very happy there. It had belonged to Sir Arthur Sullivan, and although the roomy and comfortable house was architecturally ugly, the garden made amends. It lay high above the river at the summit of a grass bank that rose steeply from the tow-path, and with its green lawns and shady trees was altogether lovely. From a summer-house where, as my father was told, Sir Arthur Sullivan wrote the "Tit Willow" song in the *Mikado*, one looked a mile up and down the river, and across to flat green meadows where the willows trailed their branches in the water.

For the first year or two, before the increasing motor-car craze lured people to the road, the river in summer-time was gay with canoes, with punts, with flower-decked houseboats, and from the path on the top of the bank it was amusing to watch the boat-loads of people drifting past our garden. But it was comforting to know that one had only to move to the garden side of the hedge bordering the path to be out of sight and sound of the revellers! Later, to my father's regret, the river became almost deserted.

But when I think of River House it is always spring, and I see the flowering shrubs that over-arch a winding walk at the end of the garden. Pyramids of lilac, purple and white, graceful trees of bird-cherry, the red and white of hawthorn bushes that scented the air made that walk a little paradise.

When we returned to our flat after a week-end at River House we were almost hidden by the blossoming branches we carried, and I have thought many times since how selfish and greedy we were to take so many flowers. But these are reflections that come with age when one looks back with unavailing regret upon the self-centredness of one's girlhood. In this connection (though by then I was no longer in my first youth), I wonder that I did not take more seriously the first symptoms of my father's illness, which declared themselves before I joyfully accepted the offer of a flat in Paris while its owner went abroad.

But for that lack of realization I hope I need not blame myself. Even my mother had no idea that there was any cause for alarm. So without misgiving I went to the little flat near the Luxembourg Gardens, and, as I have already mentioned, invited Ella D'Arcy to stay with me for a fortnight.

It was in Paris, and through Somerset Maugham,

that I made a new friend who has since become famous. Gerald Kelly, now a Royal Academician, was then only five-and-twenty, but already a very hard-working and excellent painter. Somerset Maugham, though living in Paris most of the year, was away at the time, and had asked him to call upon me. Accordingly one day soon after my arrival I opened the door to a nice-looking boy, and we immediately became friendly.

This was a prelude to the very interesting and amusing eight or ten months I spent in Paris. I used to go constantly to Gerald's studio, where we talked for hours, or rather *he* did, for though I can beat most people in that respect, I yield the palm to Gerald, who, in those days at any rate, never stopped! Fortunately his conversation was interesting and amusing, for he had a new theory about art or life every day—no, that is too moderate—every hour! And we argued unceasingly.

When Somerset Maugham returned, I had the companionship of both young men. We went several times to an interesting little theatre in the neighbourhood, and if, as I always tried to do, I had first read the play in that admirable publication *L'Illustration*, I could follow the acted version very fairly well. But as I have admitted, I am a shockingly bad linguist, and lazy about acquiring foreign languages. So though my visit lasted long enough for an industrious woman to have learnt to speak the language fluently, I never did. There was always someone to speak it for me.

While Ella D'Arcy was with me, we went one day to a little place on the outskirts of Fontainebleau, where Arnold Bennett, a friend of hers, was then living, and lunched with him in the open air at a table under trees in the midst of the village. It was the first time I had met Arnold Bennett, and truth compels me to say that neither then, nor when I again met him in Paris, did I

find it easy to get on with him. I think men liked him better than women. I believe he was an excellent friend to men, and certainly very kind to young writers. Much later my youngest brother was grateful for the letters of criticism he took the trouble to write to him about his early literary efforts. But I always found him rather "touchy" and aggressive in conversation, and I was sorry, for I had, and still have, a great admiration for his work.

The Old Wives' Tale in my opinion will be regarded as the classic presentment of the lower middle class as it existed in this country in the early years of the century. It is a great book. One faculty of Arnold Bennett's which I have always admired is his gift for making a life-like study of the ordinary "nice" young girl. As any writer knows, this is a most difficult feat, for in "the nice young girl" there are no outstanding qualities to emphasize. There is nothing to "catch hold of" to make an amiable, more or less negative character "live." Yet many times Bennett has succeeded in giving life to such a personality. To take only one instance—that of Constance in *The Old Wives' Tale*. Constance stands as clearly and definitely alive as her sister Sophia, a much cleverer, much more sparkling character, and therefore considerably less difficult to portray.

During that summer in Paris, and after Ella D'Arcy left me, a sister and one or two friends came in succession to the flat in the Rue Victor Considérant. In August, as I have already mentioned, Nell and Peter Thorp were married, and letters from home described the wedding, which took place in the only chapel of the newly built Westminster Cathedral that was then finished. Peter's Catholic friends, the Meynells, were well represented at the ceremony. At that time I did not know any of them, but much later, when my sister Mabel and her husband took Greatham Manor, close to the big farm-

house which was, and remains, Meynell's country home, I met at various times all the family. They are my sister's nearest neighbours, and till a few months before her death, whenever I stayed at Greatham Manor I had opportunities to talk to Alice Meynell, whose poems to some extent reflect a quality I recognized in their writer. It is something rare and remote from mundane things. When I talked to Mrs. Meynell I always felt that she had wandered to this earth by mistake from the more spiritual country that was her true home!

Of her large family it is Viola I know best. It is she who has written very sympathetically and beautifully her mother's life, as well as poems and several novels with a curious quality about them difficult to describe. In them, life—or so it seems to me—is seen in a way *indirectly*—as though through some transparent screen which reflects it at an angle different from that visible to the direct observer. She writes with great distinction, and has a gift which I envy, of describing the almost indescribable effects produced by mist or sunlight on a landscape. She is a poet, and it is to the poet's mind, doubtless, that she owes this peculiar gift.

But to return to my lengthy visit to Paris. After August I had no more visitors, but I was not lonely, for as well as Somerset Maugham and Gerald Kelly, Sissie Welch and her sister-in-law Julie le Gallienne were in Paris, sharing a very pretty flat. I saw them constantly, and there for the second time met Arnold Bennett.

Paris, moreover, seemed a halting place for many of the men and women I knew in town, and I lunched and dined, or went to the theatre with them and had a very gay time. But letters from my mother began to make me anxious, and in November I went home to find my father seriously ill. He had seen a specialist and learnt

that the trouble which had lately increased was tuberculosis of the throat.

He died in the February following my return from Paris after an illness which, because of the suffering we knew to be in store for him, was shorter than we had dared to hope. We put the first crocuses he had so longed to see, but was too ill to notice when they came, in the hands of the sweetest-tempered man I ever knew, and the kindest. Too easy-going and lenient, perhaps, to be altogether good for his turbulent family he was, but he hated to find fault, and he *could* not be stern. I remember how some of us laughed and teased him when on one occasion the boy to whom it referred found a slip of paper *outside* the parental desk, on which was written *Speak to Howard*. It was characteristic of him to need a reminder that he was expected to do the heavy father! But in spite of his geniality I am conscious of a certain reticence about him. He spoke little of himself, and I am sure there was much in his nature that we never understood.

Soon after his death we had to leave River House. My mother took a small but rather pretty little place at some distance from it, but still at Walton. Later she moved to a smaller house—at Weybridge—for by this time there was only one sister, the youngest of the girls, at home.

I have so far said little of my mother, greatly as her personality counted in our lives. But just here I must express the admiration I feel for her *adaptability*. Accustomed for many years to large houses and spacious rooms, I never once heard her complain about the change in her material surroundings. She took things as they came, and made the best of them. It is a great quality.

THE THORPS AND "THE DECOY"

FOR a year or two after their marriage I shared a flat with Nell and Peter Thorp, in Prince of Wales's Mansions, overlooking Battersea Park. I had my own rooms and they theirs, and on the whole the arrangement worked very well, for it was an understood thing that we did not invade one another's premises except by invitation.

In those pre-war days the mile of flats, which stretches the whole length of the road opposite the Park, in summer at least looked very gay with their window-boxes brimming over with flowers, and their coloured awnings above the balconies. They were roomy flats, the rents were low, and from those on the top storey (of which ours was one) the view over the Park was lovely.

Now the rents are doubled, and the last time I saw the flats there was a sad change in their appearance. They looked dingy and neglected, and there were no flowers.

During the years we were at Battersea, Gilbert Chesterton and his wife lived in one of the blocks at some distance from ours, as also did Sir Philip Gibbs and his wife and family. I knew the latter very slightly, but I used to go to the Chestertons' parties, and Gilbert was a well-known figure in the neighbourhood—and out of it. I remember he walked as Dr. Johnson in the Church Pageant at Lambeth (with which my friends Percy (later Canon) Dearmer and his first wife Mabel had much to do), and one might almost have imagined him a reincarnation of that famous scholar and arbiter of life, letters, and morals!

My friendship with Gerald Kelly, who had left Paris and returned to London, continued, and indeed, as I consider, *still* continues, though it is true that since his marriage I have seen little of him. My friends remain my friends even if, as in Gerald's case, their happily changed circumstances decide me to keep the friendship only in thought. But in the days I am speaking of I went often to the Vicarage at Camberwell, where for a time he lived with his parents—his father being Vicar of St. Giles's Church. It was a very large house, standing in a walled garden also immensely large for a London one, where old Mr. Kelly made a speciality of every kind of iris, with beautiful results in spring-time.

Later, Gerald had a studio in Knightsbridge.

How Past and Present become intermingled in a life as long as mine is becoming! Only an hour or two ago, as I write, in the Tate Gallery, where during this month of August 1938 a Memorial Exhibition of Glyn Philpot's pictures is to be seen, for a reason that follows, I thought suddenly of Gerald Kelly.

I met Glyn Philpot, when he was a boy of nineteen or twenty, through his friends and mine, Mildred and Mary Collyer (the younger of the two sisters not having then met her future husband Philip Connard, now a Royal Academician, but then teaching at the Lambeth School of Art, where Glyn was a pupil). At that period of his life no one outside his own circle of acquaintances had heard of Philpot, and Gerald Kelly, who had never seen him or his work, and quite justly considering me no authority, used to tease me about my admiration for his painting, and to the friends we had in common always alluded to the boy as "Netta's little genius."

Seven years later, when we happened to be at the Royal Academy together on the opening day, Gerald stopped suddenly before a picture of a group of Spanish

actors. It was the picture called "La Zazarosa," which I have just seen once again on the wall of Room XV at the Tate Gallery.

"You were right about your little genius," he said, after a moment. "I take off my hat to him."

The next time I met Glyn, I repeated this tribute from a fellow artist, and I well remember his quick smile of pleasure, and his "*No! Did he, really? How nice of him!*"

He was amazingly gifted, and not only as a painter. He composed lovely songs for many of the poems in *A Shropshire Lad*, and one at least which particularly pleased me, for a poem by Browning—the one that begins, "Nay, but you, who do not love her." The mere mention of this beautiful song takes me back to summer evenings at "The Decoy," when my brother-in-law Peter Thorp (one of whose insufficiently prized gifts was a delightful tenor voice) used to sing it—strumming out his not very successful accompaniment on the piano.

The *Shropshire Lad* songs I associate chiefly with Mary ("Mogie") Collyer, when as a girl she used to sit with her beribboned guitar on her knee, singing them in her pretty, effortless voice in our sitting-room at Morpeth Terrace. Thirty years and more later I can still almost hear her rendering of the prudent last line, "*Good-bye, young man! Good-bye!*" of the poem which so far departs from pessimism as to end on an almost playful note!

The singer was a dear friend of mine to the day of her death; the musician and painter I knew only slightly. But of him, too, long ago as it is since I last saw him, I have pleasant if, naturally, no such intimate memories.

So for a year or two life went on for me as smoothly as my temperament allowed it to go. I liked my little sitting-room with its balcony and white, sloping walls, and I wrote much, became better known as a novelist,

and gradually acquired my own "public" — a very faithful one, as with gratitude I here record.

Peter, meanwhile, was also becoming known in a world different from mine, and was always up to his eyes in the schemes and projects which he has described in his entertaining book *Friends and Adventures*. He was also making and, needless to say, *spending* money! But even with all the "spending" he and Nell were no longer in the straitened circumstances that were theirs when they first married, as his purchase of a country house for week-ends and holidays, simple enough but altogether charming, testified.

As I have never had a country home of my own, perhaps it is fortunate that I can get so fond of other people's as to make me feel that I, too, "belong." This feeling is so strong about "The Decoy," as Nell and Peter's cottage was called, that to come across photographs of it, gives me a miserable feeling of homesickness and regret for days that will never return. The photographs show it as it was at its loveliest, after many clever alterations had made it light, airy, and comfortable, and Nell had transformed the neglected little garden into a thing of beauty.

It was an interesting as well as a most charming place. Of the three cottages thrown into one which composed it, two were very old. The third, in which the rooms were larger and loftier, was added about seventy years ago. But the whole of the house was roofed with golden thatch. The garden, a real cottage garden when I first knew it, full of pinks and bush-roses and sweet-williams, was separated by a hedge from a meadow that sloped to a small lake encircled by woods. Moorhens built in the reeds that fringed the water, and sometimes one saw a heron rise majestically from an overhanging bough on its strong, slow-moving wings. The cottage owed its

name—"The Decoy"—to the fact that for centuries Arundel Castle was supplied with wild duck from the stream which ran through a wood close to it, and one could still see the remains of the tunnels over-arched by hoops of wire into which in the eighteenth century the ducks were *decoyed*.

To me there was something very mysterious about that wood, and whenever I entered it I had a curious feeling of *expectation*. It was almost as though a turn in the path might reveal some being of a primeval age—a dryad, perhaps! The stream that ran through it fell in a series of tiny cascades spanned by a dilapidated bridge, and at one point in the wood there was a small, deep pool of a wonderful colour, like a peacock's breast. Years ago there must have been a house and a garden somewhere near, for here and there among the evergreen oaks, the hazels, and the elm trees, one came across bushes of syringa and of rhododendron. Part of the wood was very swampy, and there, in spring, grew the loveliest marsh marigolds, shining like gold, and the finest and largest primroses I have ever seen.

This little stretch of woodland must have been a survival from the age-old forest which once covered the whole of Sussex, and there was certainly something primeval about it; something strange, but beautiful. Not so very long ago I wrote a story about "The Decoy," in which I transferred the feeling it gave me to a child-heroine whose ancestors lived in the great house that must once have existed somewhere near the cottage. No publisher would take the story. "Modern children don't care for fairy-tales, or for anything of a fanciful nature," I was told.

If that is true, I can only say—poor modern children!

The difficulty of finding "The Decoy" to me enhanced

its romantic atmosphere, though I can well believe that visitors in search of it would have preferred less romance, and clearer signs of its whereabouts! One turned off the main road from Arundel and opened a gate leading into a wide grassy lane, with great trees on either hand. Presently the lane forked right and left, and still there was no sign of a cottage. But if you were lucky and took the right-hand path, a turn in it presently revealed the corner of a thatched roof and a chimney stack, and you were at your journey's end.

Some years after they took it, my sister and brother-in-law moved from London and for a time lived all the year round at "The Decoy." This meant that a certain amount of furniture from the London flat was necessary, and though in their new guise the rooms were charming, I preferred their former simplicity, when the walls were either whitewashed or tinted blush-rose colour, when the chairs and tables were of the simplest, and blue-and-white check or plain white muslin curtains fluttered at the windows.

It is with "The Decoy" that I chiefly connect two of the worst-tempered but undeniably beautiful animals I ever met—my sister's Pekinese, Toto, and her cat Puff. The cat was a smoke-grey Persian, to whom every human being except her mistress was antipathetic. You stroked her at your peril! Several times offered in marriage to toms of high lineage, she spurned and terrified all her suitors, and till she left London remained fiercely virgin. Once free to choose her own mate in country surroundings, she selected the commonest cat in the neighbourhood, a fellow, as my sister used to declare, with a billycock hat on one side and a clay pipe in his mouth! By this unattractive lover she had three offspring: two grey, and "Persian" like herself, the third with all the regrettable attributes of his sire. But

Puff was equal to the occasion. She sat on and killed the vulgarian, obliterating thus the memory as well as the shame of a *mésalliance*. She was an uncanny creature, moved by mysterious promptings, the nature of which it was impossible even to guess. When she had not been seen for some hours, my sister, always afraid of traps, used to go into the garden and sing the little German folk song which begins, "*Kommt ein Vogel geflogen*." In a few minutes, appearing from nowhere like a grey phantom (if it happened to be twilight), Puff would come into sight. No calling, no rattling of spoons on a plate, no other song would bring her. But this one acted like a magnet, drawing her as surely as the Pied Piper drew after him the children of Hamelin town. I saw this happen so many times that in spite of initial scepticism I was forced to believe it.

Here is the poem addressed to the disdainful beauty by her mistress:

PUFF

Puff is my cat with golden eyes,
 Grey Persian, made of silk,
 Her food the silver flashing fish,
 Her drink the richest milk.
 She's good and bad
 And bad and good—
 And one can never tell
 If she will fly with angel cats
 Or claw with those in hell!

Poor naughty Puff died of her second family, and Toto, even naughtier, and in his own way quite as beautiful, succeeded her in the Thorp ménage. Again, with the exception of his mistress, Toto liked the human race little better than Puff had done, though, after biting me once, he repented, took a fancy to me, and I was allowed liberties with him that others got bitten for

merely attempting. He was an amusing, plucky little dog, in spite of his bad temper, and I was fond of him. But to Nell his death a year or two ago is still such a grief that the less I say about him here the better.

Certain people have told me that they felt an unhappy, depressing influence about "The Decoy," but I who knew it well and was sometimes, except for one maid, alone there for a week or two, never experienced this. To me its atmosphere, as I have said, hinted rather at mystery and a sense of expectation. Not unhappy expectation, either! But "The Decoy," like so many other places I have loved, is now only a memory.

Very many of these loved places are in Italy, and this seems the moment to speak of my visits to that country. They were longer visits than the few holiday weeks which the great majority of people are able to enjoy. Some of them lasted at least five or six months, and one for nearly a year. To give a reason for their length means writing of the brother but for whom I might never have known Italy at all, and if I write of him at some length, it is because I believe the world of letters lost in him a brilliant novelist. This opinion I hold with the greater confidence because it is shared and has been stated by a writer himself famous both as novelist and critic—Somerset Maugham.

CHAPTER XV

JACK

I WAS sixteen when Jack, the youngest of the family, was born, less than two months after the death of my sister Dora. He was christened Jerrard, but from the time he could speak he repudiated the name, insisting that he was *Jack*—and as Jack he was known throughout a life which, gifted as he was, should have been successful, but became a tragedy. Much of the nervous trouble which after adolescence ruined his life I believe can be traced to a pre-natal cause.

All through the nine months before he came into the world my mother was in great mental distress, for she knew Dora's illness to be fatal. She had never lost a child, and she fretted continually. The strain of keeping outwardly cheerful in nursing my sister cannot have been without its effect on the coming baby, who from his birth was abnormally nervous and highly strung. But he was a most charming and fascinating child.

In a recent novel of mine, called *Angel Unawares*, except that for the purposes of the story I bestowed upon him psychic gifts which (so far as I know) he did not possess, I have drawn a faithful picture of Jack at seven years old. With that exception, everything related of him is true.

Soon after *Angel Unawares* was published, the Norah Richardson of whom I have written, one of his play-mates when she herself was a child, wrote to me about the book. She had just seen a review in which the little boy was pronounced "very unconvincing." "It is amusing," she said, "to read that criticism of the only

non-fictitious character in the story! It is Jack to the life, and the tears were often in my eyes as I read."

But certainly he was fantastic enough to excuse the critic's disbelief in the character, for to whatever he did or said, he contrived to give an odd, unexpected twist. For instance, at the age of six, instead of making a list of things he wanted at the approach of Christmas, he wrote on a slip of paper the presents to be *avoided*, and I recall certain items on that list.

"The Holly Bibbel. Litel Arthur's Play Jography. Bokes about animils. . . . *If anny one givs me anny of these I shall destroi them,*" were the concluding words.

His naughtiness as a little boy had always some element of absurdity about it. I remember how once, escaping from the nursery, he went to the bathroom alone, undressed, and having bolted the door, returned no answer to his nurse's repeated appeals to be let in. Finally, thoroughly frightened, she called my mother, who, knocking frantically, commanded him to get out of the bath and open the door immediately.

A weak voice at last answered, "I can't," and when my father, summoned in haste, had manipulated the bolt with a pen-knife, Jack was discovered rather faint because the water was too hot, looking as though he had been suddenly attacked by some appalling skin disease. He had drawn picture "transfers" all over his body, which was tattooed with cats and dogs, little girls holding bouquets of flowers, little boys skating, riding, bowling hoops, all highly coloured, and requiring much soaping and rubbing for their removal. . . .

In writing earlier in this book of Aubrey Beardsley, I was struck by the many points of resemblance in early youth between that gifted boy and my brother, though of course in actual achievement no comparison is possible.

Like Aubrey, with scarcely any musical teaching, and very early, Jack played remarkably well, and as a child of nine or ten he used to sit at the piano improvising and singing to his own accompaniment. I see him now, perched on a high music-stool, legs dangling, the ends of his flaxen hair lighted up by the piano candles, singing what he called "a love song," whose refrain was "I reject thee!"

"*Like Little Schoolmaster Mark!*" Evelyn Sharp, who was on a visit to us, whispered to me one evening as she sat watching him. (Shorthouse's book, with that title, its chief character a boy musician, had not long been published.)

In his childish attempts at writing, Beardsley's exotic prose-romance *Under the Hill* evidently inspired him, for a ridiculous story of his, entitled *Granetta*, reads like a parody of that exercise in the stylized presentation of abnormality. It must have been the curious, unusual words, the mysterious atmosphere, that fascinated him, for of its meaning he could not have had even the faintest idea. His talent for drawing, or rather for *design*, again a natural untrained talent (of which I shall say something later), also reminds me of Beardsley, whose study at an Art School lasted two months!

Of course Jack was spoilt. My mother had a special reason for adoring him—the child who brought consolation for the recent death of another one. But indeed it was difficult to avoid spoiling Jack, who never exhibited the disagreeable qualities incidental to most petted children. Though often exasperating in his own way, he was sweet-tempered; never peevish or a cry-baby. A sterner upbringing could not have averted the later nervous disorder which wasted and wrecked years of his life, though it might have made his first school experience less unbearable than he found it, and have

prevented him from trying to end it by the simple expedient of returning home! His method of accomplishing this, in other words of running away from his preparatory school, was characteristic. He wrote a very handsome testimonial to the headmaster, absolving him from all blame. Leaving this tribute where it was unlikely to be found till he himself was well off the premises, he slipped out of the house one evening, reached the station, and hiding under a seat in a waiting train, reached Warnham. Casually mentioning the name *Syrett* he got past a puzzled country ticket-collector who, of course, knew him, walked two or three miles in the dark, and finally opened the drawing-room door at home to appear before the amazed, incredulous eyes of my mother.

"What a good thing I came! You'd have been alone to-night," he remarked, on hearing that my father was away for a few days.

Early next morning, despite his protests that he couldn't stand the disgusting table manners of the boys, my mother took him back, and the headmaster, very nobly in view of all the trouble and anxiety he had given (two assistant masters had been out on their bicycles all night searching for him), forgave him, only stipulating that he should explain his conduct to his schoolfellows himself.

This Jack found quite an exhilarating experience. Far from viewing him with disdain, the boys greeted him as a hero, and when shortly afterwards they discovered that he could play any tune they wanted on the piano, from being the victim of their bullying he became popular.

"There's a boy here who has eyes like kippers," he once wrote to me from school, and when he brought his friend home at the half term I saw exactly what he meant. They were the kind of shiny, rather *oily* brown

eyes that recalled that breakfast fish! Jack's similes were always excellent.

To write, as I had almost done, that I wished I had only my brother's childhood to remember would be lacking in gratitude for the delightful companionship he gave me in later years. But for *him* it would have been better if his life had ended before he reached manhood.

He returned from a six months' visit to America, where he hoped to gain business experience in a publisher's firm, in such a terribly nervous condition that we might have been warned of the impossibility of any ordinary profession for him. But my father's death soon afterwards, and all the changes it involved, distracted our attention. He did, indeed, enter a publisher's office in London, but finally decided to live abroad, and as pre-war Italy offered the best value for a tiny income, it was to Italy he went. Having already begun to write, we hoped he might earn enough by his pen to live there in simple comfort.

I went with him on that first journey, and for years afterwards, at intervals, joined him in various cities, for months at a time. These visits for me were always overshadowed by fear of certain black moods of his when he would disappear for days or even weeks, leaving me in terrible anxiety about him. But I do not forget the happier times that intervened, nor that he always looked forward eagerly to my visits.

On that first journey we went straight through to Siena, stopping only a few hours in Florence to wait for a train. It was summer-time, and I shall never forget the heat on the Lung Arno, where we walked for a little while. It was Jack's first visit to Italy, and I wanted him to see the river spanned by its lovely bridges, with the mountains closing the view.

An English-speaking official at the station to which we returned put us into a train which he said went to Siena without change. Travellers in pre-war Italy will not be surprised to learn that it did nothing of the sort, and that neither of us speaking a word of Italian we were as nearly as possible taken on to some unknown destination. Having with mad haste collected our belongings and hurled them and ourselves out of the carriage, we waited ages for the connection, and only very late at night arrived at the pension where our rooms were booked.

It was a bad beginning, and as we drove through the narrow, dark streets of the little city to which we were both strangers my heart sank, and my depression of spirits was accentuated by the physical sensation of feeling swollen all over. By the next morning I was almost unrecognizable from the effect of mosquito bites acquired through that walk on the Lung Arno. I couldn't get on any shoes, and had to send for a doctor, who at first frightened me to death (he spoke English fairly well) by saying, as he examined my feet and ankles, "Mosquitoes? *Mai! Impossible!*" Then, after scrutiny with a magnifying-glass, he added, "Vero! But I never saw anything like such thing in my life!" Nor did I ever *feel* anything like such thing! There was one good result. I was so well inoculated that I never felt another bite throughout the six months I stayed in Siena, where in the pension I was always known as "the Lady of the Mosquitoes."

It was an enchanting six months, for both of us fell in love with Siena at daylight sight of it, and for the first time I knew the joy of *living* in a beautiful place as opposed to visiting it as a tourist. It was wonderful to do our sightseeing in a leisurely fashion, and for weeks on end to do none at all, but just to live there from day to day like the local inhabitants.

I have completely forgotten the name of our pension, but its entrance was in one of the typically narrow streets of the city, which to the uninitiated give no hint of the marvellous view commanded by the windows on the other side of buildings that, like ours, were once palaces. We paid four and a half lire a day—inclusive of everything! My bedroom looked over miles of the type of undulating country one sees as the background of a Perugino picture, with its groups of graceful, feathery trees, its cypresses standing like sentinels round little ancient churches, and beyond the city walls, the blue distances stretching away to the horizon.

Before I had been there many days I found a steep staircase behind a closed door which led to a terrace at the top of the house. From the side of the parapet bounding it one looked down upon the huddled, lovely coloured roofs of a part of the town, with the vast panorama of the countryside stretching for miles and miles straight ahead.

Here every morning (until to my annoyance other people discovered the terrace) I used to write, while Jack, determined to learn Italian, wrestled with grammar books and dictionaries. He loved the language, and eventually spoke it almost like a native, but as (except for the break of the war) he made Italy his home, this was not surprising. I picked up just enough not to be helpless if ever I happened to be alone, but as we were nearly always together, this seldom happened, and my laziness where foreign languages are concerned continued. In other respects I was far from lazy, for I wrote a great deal in Italy. One, at least, of my novels, *Olivia L. Carew*, has Siena for a background, and a life of Catherine of Siena for children was partly written there, and partly in Florence.

I look back upon that six months in Siena as a time of

great happiness. Except when he was in one of his black moods, Jack was a most delightful and amusing companion. We made pleasant acquaintances in the pension, the nicest of them a young American woman with whom we used to go for long walks. One of these walks had for its objective the castle which from my bedroom window I could see far out in the country, called, as I learnt from the *padrone*, The Four Towers. It was an appropriate name, for though it was far enough away to look almost like a child's toy, I could plainly see the towers at its four angles.

I was determined to view it at close quarters, and though the walk to it was long and tiring, we were rewarded when we got there, for it was the most enchanting and curious place.

The ladies who owned it were the last descendants of a once wealthy and noble family, to whom in the Middle Ages the castle had belonged. They were as poor as church mice now, and I believe every year made efforts to get paying guests. We wondered whether it would be at all possible to stay there, but as we followed the pathetic little women through room after room in the huge castle, bare, destitute even of window curtains, I knew it would be altogether too uncomfortable. But it was the strangest place imaginable, and because a child's story I wrote a few months later embodies a description more vividly in my memory then, than after the lapse of many years it now exists, I copy a few paragraphs from the book I called *The Castle of Four Towers*:

And now the garden! To picture it you must imagine the Castle a great square cup or goblet set into a saucer of the same shape. This saucer formed a square rim or shelf following the lines of the walls. The rim was very narrow and bounded by an ancient wall, from

which, ten or twelve feet below, the land, covered with vineyards, sloped north, south, east, and west. . . . There were flowers growing in the rim of this square saucer—pink monthly roses, clumps of rosemary, golden rod. . . .

But it was the western "rim" which most interested Benedetta, for from it, perched on its hill some four miles away, she saw Siena like a town in a fairy-tale against the sky. . . .

The Castle itself looked like something in a fairy-tale too. Built of brick, old, brown, stained by the ruin and sun of hundreds of years, it stood foursquare, with the towers to which it owed its name rising at the four angles. Each tower had a crinkled pattern of brickwork near its summit, and was pierced by narrow windows. . . .

The mention of that "western rim" in the story from which I have quoted recalls the beauty of Siena as seen from it with a sunset sky as background. It was like a vision of some celestial city, and one almost expected to see it fade and disappear!

Siena stands high, if not quite so high as the heavens, and though we were there all through August, except for a couple of hours in the middle of the day, when every one took a *siesta*, it was never too hot for me. And how heavenly the country was in the autumn when the feathery trees in the landscape turned gold! We saw the vintage. Often far out in the country we passed farms where the peasants, with feet and legs stained purple, were treading out the grapes in great vats in the open air, singing and shouting as they danced upon the seething mass of pulp. We saw the gentle white velvet bullocks, with their enormous horns wreathed with vine-leaves and tassels of scarlet wool, drawing great carts piled with purple grapes. It was all a lovely enchantment for us, and the city itself, with its arcaded

streets, its piazza like a huge ribbed shell, its campanile, its marvellous cathedral striped in black-and-white like an impossible dream-tiger, was the essence of romance.

To our great annoyance, knowing at the time nothing of the ceremony called the Palio, we missed by a day or two on our arrival that wonderful six hundred years old pageant held annually in the piazza or Campo. But Jack, who as the years went on lived much in Siena, once wrote me a vivid account of it, describing the beauty of the "throwing of the banners," part of a ceremony that goes back to the fourteenth century.

Every one who knows Siena knows of the *Contrade*, the seventeen companies of young men corresponding to the seventeen divisions of the city, each one named after some animal, bird, or insect—the Tortoise, the Owl, the Caterpillar—each with its own special church (if ever there was a fantastic fairy-tale city it is Siena!). Every one who has lived there also knows that (apart from the Palio races) on any special occasion the *Contrade* in their mediaeval dress may be seen strolling about the streets, entering or leaving the cathedral.

While I was there, to do honour to some eminent ecclesiastic, the *Contrade* turned out in full force, and in my memory there dwell many lovely pictures of them strolling by twos and threes across the great piazza, or grouped in the twilight about the fountain. It was then, in the twilight, when ill-fitting wigs were not sufficiently visible to spoil the effect, that one was back in the Middle Ages. The setting was there, untouched—the great Mangia tower, the rose-pink Palace, the ancient houses, and there also were the people of long ago in their habit as they lived. . . . Lovely Siena!

It was some months after our arrival that to my delight Jack heard of the acceptance of his first novel. He

seemed to take the news very quietly, but later I knew he had been more inwardly excited than was at all good for him.

And after all, that book, though set up in print, was never published! It is in my possession now, in the form in which some firms send out proofs—to all intents a book, but bound only in brown paper. I will not mention the name of the publisher who eventually decided not to bring it out, because the reason he gave for being afraid to do so convicts him of being not only idiotically foolish, but of possessing a corrupt mind. He imagined he had found in it a horrible suggestion which simply is not there, Jack himself being astonished and overwhelmed by having attributed to him something he had never even imagined, much less written!

The novel has the faults one might expect in a young unpractised writer, but it contains what to me seems a very wonderful study of the mind and heart of a woman of forty who grasps at her last chance of sexual experience. When I remember that it was written by a boy of three-and-twenty, my wonder is increased.

Till the second year of the war, when he returned to join the Army, Jack continued to live in Italy, sometimes in Florence, at others in Rome or in Siena. But when his nervous illness increased and he had to accept medical treatment for neurasthenia, he used to go to a sanatorium near Pistoia, where not altogether unhappily he would stay a year or even longer at a time. The place was beautifully situated; he liked the doctors and some of the patients, and he could write and paint in peace.

I never saw Siena again, and though on several occasions I went to Pistoia for the day to look at some of its interesting buildings and see the gardens of the sanatorium, I never stayed there. But I spent many months

in Rome, and even more time in Florence with my brother.

Once when Jack and I were in Florence together I had rather an interesting and amusing experience, the outcome of which enabled us to see two Italian cities we might not otherwise have visited.

At the time I had a very lively and amusing literary agent, with whom in town I used often to lunch, and he wrote to me occasionally when I was abroad. One of his letters while I was in Florence contained a sporting offer. A certain publisher, he said, was very anxious to get a life of Labouchere, who was then living in a villa on the outskirts of the city. He had repeatedly refused to write or to allow anyone else to write his life, and it was reputed to be very difficult to get an interview with him. My agent suggested that if I could gain admittance I might persuade him to let *me* undertake what he had so persistently refused to do. (I may incidentally remark that not being politically minded, I knew absolutely nothing about Labouchere, but I suppose that didn't matter! He was to pour out the story of his life to me, and I was to put it into shape, with appropriate and possibly needful embroidery.) I had no hope of, nor even any wish for, success in the suggested mission, but I thought it would be amusing just to see him if possible, especially as I was to have five pounds if I managed to achieve even that! So I put on my smartest hat, took a little carriage and drove out to the villa.

The footman who opened the door asked me to sit down while he went to see if Mr. Labouchere would receive me, and having presumably assured his master that I looked harmless, I was invited into a room, where I found a little old gentleman with dark eyes who in some curious way (for he wasn't really at all like him)

reminded me so much of my grandfather that I felt quite at home with him.

He received my request with a smiling shake of the head, and as I was only too glad not to press the matter, we chatted amiably for a few minutes, shook hands, and I returned to the waiting carriage—having earned my five pounds. Here is the letter I received from Henry Labouchere some time after my return to England. The publisher who wanted his autobiography must have written once again to suggest my help, for *I* never troubled him further in the matter.

VILLA CRISTINA,
MONTUGHI, FLORENCE,
24th July.

Dear Miss Syrett,

If I wanted to write my memoirs your plan would no doubt render it easy. But this is precisely what I don't want to do. I think that there are far too many written nowadays. In politics, those who do really know the dessous des cartes, seldom do. The reason is in part because they do not want the bother, and in part because they cannot well do so. If they have exercised a great influence in their day, someone occasionally does write their life after they are dead, but in these cases I never knew one life which was worth the reading. And in the cases where I knew the man, one which told the truth.

Personally I never understood the reason why anyone should care what may be thought of a person after he is dead. Either his personality disappears in the common stock of the universe, or the conditions under which this personality is continued are so altered that he must regard this planet as a little ant-hill—so small and so unimportant that he must be very little interested in it.

We are having a hot wave just now here, but we

THE SHELTERING TREE

console ourselves when we see that most of Europe is also rather warm.

Yours truly,

H. LABOUCHERE

Except for the month, the letter is not dated, and I don't know how long before his death it was written.

My little cheque duly arrived, and it may be of interest to present-day travellers to hear what in pre-war Italy one could do on five pounds. My brother and I went away for a week, first to Perugia, then to Assisi. In both places we stayed at simple but quite good hotels. Certainly we travelled third class, but in spite of warnings that this was really impossible in Italy, we found the railway carriages clean and, to compensate for the hardness of the seats, free from the fleas which in upholstered carriages always drove me mad. We had a most delightful week without spending a penny more than the five pounds with which we set out!

Of that little journey I remember best the heavenly blue of Lake Trasimeno which we passed on the way, a kind of milky blue indescribably soft and gentle in tone, as though it had been a creation of Fra Angelico's rather than a mere sheet of water; the wonderful façade of the Church of Santi Andrea e Bernardino, just outside Perugia, and, of course, the great Church of St. Francis at Assisi. But to me, Assisi, though lovely, was overwhelmingly sad, with its grass-grown streets and its deserted atmosphere. Now I dare say it bristles with efficiency, and (a probability considerably more to my liking) is no doubt cleaner than it was when Jack and I wandered in and out of its churches. Every night when I undressed I found a wreath of fleas edging the frills on my white petticoat, and this, transferring

itself mysteriously to my nightdress, made sleep impossible for me at Assisi. But as the rose and the thorn are inseparable, so in the Italy of my day the insects, which love me with a literally devouring passion, had to be taken with the beauty, as a reminder that nothing in this life is quite perfect.

For the happy times I spent there (in spite of bites and stings), I give thanks to whatever gods there be!

Florence, like Siena, became for me, and, of course, even more for Jack, a city well enough known to make sightseeing a matter of entering a church, a palace, a picture gallery just when we pleased—without rush or hurry, or any feeling that we were missing something we might never see again.

In Florence one winter, at the little pension at which we usually stayed, we made the acquaintance of a charming mother and daughter from Boston, with whom, for many years after they returned to their native land, Jack and I corresponded. They were Quakers, and in addressing one another always used the pretty “thee” and “thou.” It was from them for the first time I heard that in America houses were often moved bodily from one side of a road or street to the other, and the name of their own house—“Opposite”—expressed the transition that had taken place. They were unendingly kind to both of us, and it was a real grief to hear, now many years ago, of Mrs. Hallowell’s sudden death. Both mother and daughter had a sense of humour and were not taken in by Jack’s incorrigible habit of “playing-acting.” Except for the faces of the people to whom he happened to be talking, I never knew what rôle he would next adopt to get amusement out of giving a wrong impression of himself to strangers.

“I think that young gentleman who sat next me at

dinner must be in Holy Orders," I heard one dear old thing say to a friend in an impressed tone, and I then remembered noticing a certain pious expression on Jack's face which had evidently persisted during the meal. His shrieks of delighted laughter when I repeated the remark to him showed that he was satisfied with his work. This play-acting was a pastime that dated from his childhood. He always took an impish delight in exasperating people who were at all likely to "rise" in response to his uncanny sense of what would most annoy them.

" . . . Shall I say my new text to you, father?"

I remember a face that might have been the Infant Samuel's raised to my father's at some moment when he was in a hurry, or a trifle worried.

"For God's sake, don't!" would be the emphatic reply. And, as his expression indicated, Jack had scored again.

"I can't understand the boy, Mrs. Syrett," the headmaster of his preparatory school complained. "He seems in some respects so *dense*. For instance, I was showing him and a few other lads some brass rubbings I had taken, and about one in particular I think I must have talked for at *least* twenty minutes. I had scarcely stopped when Syrett indicated that very one, and said, 'But this, sir? You haven't told us anything about *this* one?'"

Poor puzzled man! I can picture the innocence in the face of a little boy who could not possibly be suspected of pulling his leg and therefore must be slightly "wanting."

I think it was the year we met the Hallowells that we decided to spend some weeks of the summer at San Donato, a little village in the hills above Florence which

one reached by *diligence*. I took a tiny, sparsely furnished flat in the village street, and as there was only one bedroom, Jack was lodged two or three doors away and came to me for meals.

The husband and wife in whose little house he had a room were delightful people of the peasant class. The wife, Maria, was my *femme de ménage*, and Nanni, her handsome young husband, worked on the land, and sometimes in the evening while Maria was getting dinner ready in my flat, he would come in and, sitting on the floor, with his back against the wall, repeat, half singing, half reciting, a "poem" which must have had a thousand verses!

I didn't understand a word of it, but Jack occasionally gave me a running translation of a sentimental story in verse—something analogous to "The Fireman's Wedding," once popular among the English working class. Nanni and Maria adored Jack, who stayed on with them for months after I returned to London.

But I spent part of the summer with him at San Donato. We went on the first of May. It began to rain as we got out of the *diligence* when the village was reached, and to my intense disappointment, for I had always longed to see a Tuscan spring in the real country, went on raining for what at any rate *seemed* like weeks! There were no fireplaces in the brand-new flat I inhabited. I was perished with cold, and used to sit with a *scaldino* on my lap all day long, trying with frozen hands to write. Every one was in despair. No sun, no grape harvest! At last a priest in a very dirty cassock headed a procession of villagers, chanting and singing as they walked round the vineyards in the immediate neighbourhood, and the next day—a triumph for faith!—the sun came out.

And oh, how lovely the country was then! I shall

never forget our long walks over the hills, with cushions of rock roses, pink and yellow, on either side of the winding paths, and sheets of yellow broom on the slopes of the hills; nor the little shrines we passed, smothered with banksia roses.

Besides vineyards, the district produced orris root, and there were great fields of purple irises between the acres of vines. I used to take great armfuls of the flowers back to my flat, for as the root alone is commercially valuable, no one minded how many I gathered. Large earthenware jars which were to be bought in the village for a trifling sum were ideal for holding the flowers, which made a lovely splash of colour against the walls of my bare little rooms, and from the garden of a villa whose owners were away for the whole summer, Maria, whose duty it was to keep the place aired, brought me boughs of guelder roses and sprays of honeysuckle.

We would often take our lunch and be out all day, walking leisurely, with long rests at intervals. From the windows of my flat, far away in the distance, one could see Vallombrosa, its white buildings looking like a flock of sheep on the mountain slopes. And at night there was the wonderful moonlight, the strange, incessant croaking of the frogs! It was a lovely time!

But San Donato itself was as ugly and squalid as compared with the beauty of ours, Italian villages mostly are. In those pre-war days every woman threw all the rubbish of the house into the street, with swarms of flies as the result. My flat being newly built, and such furniture as it had also new, was at least clean. But as the weather grew hotter I could not keep the abominable flies out of the place, and this plague, added to the bad food, decided me to return to civilization. Such meat as there was, neither of us could touch; it was impossible

to get fruit or green vegetables, and we ate so little of the macaroni and the thin soup which was our daily fare that perhaps it was fortunate when first Jack, and then I, felt faint and ill enough to make us realize we were being starved.

I went back to Florence for a few days before returning to England, leaving Jack at San Donato after we had made arrangements for a weekly hamper of food to be sent to him from Florence to supplement the unattractive meals. But before I left the village we saw one day what to me remains an unforgettable scene. I was starting for a walk, meaning as usual to call to Jack as I passed his house, when I saw a crowd of women on the crest of the hill to which the single street of the village climbed, and all at once there was a clamour of bells from the little church.

"What's all this?" I asked Jack, who met me half-way up the hill.

"I don't know. They ring like that when there's a thunderstorm," he said. "But," looking up at the blue sky overhead, "there isn't a sign of a storm!"

By this time some of the women on the hill-top were kneeling, crossing themselves, and chattering in frightened voices. When we joined them at a point from which one looked down on Florence lying in the valley, I didn't wonder at the excitement. It was like looking into a gigantic ink-well! The city was blotted out, and all the hollow was filled with darkness, pitch black, most frightening darkness! The clamour of the bells went on, and we heard a few low growls of thunder. But overhead the sky was still blue; and though later we heard that a terrible storm had broken over Florence, we at our airy height scarcely felt it. It is the hailstones that are so dreaded for the vineyards, and I was interested to hear that the church bells were always rung

during a thunderstorm to avert this catastrophe brought about by the Evil One.

I should like to have learnt more than I was able to do about the folklore of the Italian peasants. Once when we had walked far into the country we stopped to speak to a little girl who held a bunch of green stuff and seemed to be hunting for more of it. "What are you looking for?" Jack asked. The child was very shy, but she murmured, "The Herb of Fear," and would say nothing more.

That evening when Maria came in, Jack asked her what the child meant. She laughed in rather an embarrassed way, said it was a "superstition" and for a long time was very evasive about what she rather half-heartedly called "nonsense of the country folk." (Maria, within easy distance of Florence, considered herself "advanced.") I wish I could remember exactly what she told us about the efficacy of this herb which, in spite of its sinister name, was a charm to *counteract* fear. I wrote an article about it which appeared in some paper soon after I returned to England, and I know the practice was traceable to the story of the "heel of Achilles," but the details escape me. That the "charm" was frequently resorted to by the more primitive peasants, Maria admitted.

One of the advantages of living in Italy with Jack was that his fluent Italian made it possible to stay in places generally visited for a few hours only by the ordinary tourist. We once lived some little time, for instance, in many-towered San Gimignano, where, then, no one spoke either French or English, and really got to know that wonderful relic of the Middle Ages, with all the legends of its horrible little Santa Fina, its most revered and *dirtiest* saint!

For years I went so often to Italy, that my memories, though vivid, are confused as to dates and seasons. Sometimes when Jack was ill and at the sanatorium, to which he returned at intervals, I stayed alone at pensions; sometimes with my charming English friend Alison Fernie, the singer, who for many years has made her home in Florence. She is still there, but I'm afraid I shall never go to Italy again. In the old days she used to take me to parties at the villas of her American and English friends, and on these occasions I always managed to escape from the crowded rooms and the society of the English colony into gardens that were dreams of beauty, with their alleys of cypresses, their fountains, and statues, and their marvellous views over the Tuscan plains, returning to the drawing-room just in time to make polite farewell speeches to hostesses who never knew how much I had been enjoying my solitary rambles away from the crowd in the house!

A woman I once met, when I happened to be alone in Florence, interested me enormously. She was an American, who, with her husband, a schoolmaster somewhere from the back of beyond in America, and her only child, little more than a baby, was at the pension where I happened to be staying. It was the husband's "sabbatical year"—the year allowed to American teachers after completing a certain period of work. His wife was a charming little creature for whom I felt intensely sorry. With so young a child to look after, she was almost a prisoner. It was the husband who did all the sightseeing, and apparently it never occurred to him even occasionally to stay at home with the baby and let his wife go out.

I can't remember exactly where their home was in

America, but it was so far from civilization that the little lady told me she had never heard a concert, never seen any but photographs of famous pictures, never been to a play in her life. Yet she was quite exceptionally intelligent, and in her "home town," wherever it might have been, she had started a dramatic society, and she and her friends used to act plays by Shakespeare, Sheridan, Goldsmith, Ibsen—without any idea of how they were presented on the stage. They had to make their own "precedents," for they had none to guide them. (This was, of course, long before the days of wireless.) But she was intensely, wistfully interested in all forms of art, and as nurse to a child too young to walk much, and too big to be carried or wheeled in a perambulator, here she was in a city like Florence unable to gratify her longing to catch more than a glimpse of the pictures, the sculpture, the architecture she knew only through books. It was a case of "Water, water everywhere—and not a drop to drink!"

As was only natural, her child came first, meant much to her, and she never complained. But I felt indignant that there should be no attempt on her husband's part to take his share of looking after it, and one evening I boldly asked him to do so. He was not too amiable, but I gained my point, left him to put the boy to bed, and his wife and I went out together. I took her up to San Miniato to see the sunset and the lovely view of the city from the piazza in front of the church, and she was enraptured. We lingered there till it grew dark, and she plied me with eager questions about London, to which their tour did not extend.

I remember that as we walked back to the pension by the tree-shaded paths that led to it, the darkness was all spangled and alive with fireflies. It was the first time that either of us had seen them, so that halt of a few

days in Florence must have been just after I left Jack at San Donato. He had been so disappointed for my sake that owing to the cold and wet of the early part of May I had to leave before the lovely things made their appearance there. He had so often tried to describe their beauty to me that I was glad to let him know I had not left Italy without seeing them for myself.

After I returned to England on that occasion I had a charming and to me very touching letter from my friend of a few days, full of those American phrases which fall so quaintly upon English ears (as when in answer to my question about some rooms she had taken, an American girl replied, "Thank you, I am most congenially located!") I have long ago forgotten the name of the little wife of that schoolmaster, but I have often since thought of her and tried to picture her existence in that "home town" at the back of beyond, in days now far away in time.

Italy has provided me with several unpleasant as well as delightful experiences. I was there when the earthquake in Florence that followed the Messina disaster happened, and many years afterwards at Amalfi, when a cloudburst devastated villages in its neighbourhood and wrecked the famous hanging gardens of the Capuccini Monastery. Earthquakes—even mild ones—if you do not happen to be used to them, are by no means soothing occurrences, and I have a very vivid memory of the only one I have experienced. Its terrifying quality was heightened by the stories we had all heard of the Messina tragedy only a few weeks previously (a tragedy, by the way, of which a day or two before the news reached us, I had *dreamt*).

But on the night of the earthquake in Florence I had gone with an acquaintance to a little party at the house

of friends of hers, and in reply to some remark of mine about the beauty of the city, a young English-speaking Italian (who doubtless would thoroughly approve of the destruction now going on in London) declared he hated "old things," and would like to see the wretched city swept away and replaced by something "modern." I thought of that fatuous remark when at one o'clock in the morning after the party, just as I had gone to sleep, the rocking of my bed woke me.

There was no electric light in my room. Italian matches are, or *were*, the worst I ever knew, and it seemed ages before I could get one to strike. The candle was lighted at last, and I gazed with fascinated horror upon my bedclothes, writhing about as though dozens of snakes were concealed in their folds.

With Messina in mind I thought, "I've got to die, but I will not die alone!"

Springing up, and without knowing or caring who was in the next room, I rushed in, and found a girl sitting up in bed, and only too thankful to see me. The rooms were still rocking, and the jingling and rattling of basins and jugs on the washstand mingled with the sound of frightened voices all over the house.

In making my hurried entrance to the girl's bedroom I had left the door open and we saw lights go up in the passage, and then the figure of Francesco, the head waiter, in his nightshirt, with whom, standing in my nightdress, I held a hasty conversation before he went on to other rooms to assure every one that nothing of any consequence ever had, would, or *could* happen in Florence! Very ridiculous, of course, but quite consoling, and Francesco, whom I had not hitherto liked, went up in my estimation. He behaved very well.

The tremors ceased, were repeated, but more faintly, at intervals, and we returned to our beds, if not to sleep.

Next morning we heard of the alarm in the cafés, and how many people—no doubt with Messina in mind—had fled into the country. But though certain houses, and even certain ancient buildings, showed great cracks in their walls, very little damage was done—curiously enough, however, more than at Pistoia (where Jack was at the time), though Pistoia, unlike Florence, is in the earthquake zone, and on volcanic soil.

It certainly was not a pleasant experience, and I remember how, when the rocking began, the stupid remark of the young Italian and the dream that had visited me before the Messina earthquake darted simultaneously into my mind. I was in a street of some town (in the dream); a horrible copper-coloured sky seemed to be pressing just over my head, and there was a terrible sense of fear in my heart. Then there came the sound of wildly rushing feet—and I was all at once and most thankfully awake. I had forgotten that dream till news of the Messina earthquake with all its horrors reached us a few days later in Florence.

THOMAS HARDY—THE PEN CLUB

HAVING telescoped so many of my Italian visits, it is time to return to England, where, after all, most of my life has been spent.

The rooms I took after my father's death were in Buckingham Palace Road. I had two floors at the top of a fairly old house, and a daily maid who provided me with constant amusement. She was a youthful Mrs. Malaprop, whose absurdities of speech were so unbelievable that I was constantly accused of romancing when I quoted her "nice derangements of epitaphs." Her name was Rose, and "the Rosary," as I called her ridiculous sayings, was in constant demand by some of my friends. She was a gay, rather pretty little married woman with the brains of a rabbit, but fortunately for me an aptitude for housework and cooking. I have drawn her as Lizzie Coles in a little book published by Rich and Cowan called *The House that Was*—a ghost story in a book that, but for an annoying circumstance, should have included another less than full-length novel called *Who was Florriemay?*—one of the Ernest Benn series of stories by modern writers. Rather to my surprise, *The House that Was*, written five years ago, appears to be still selling.

Though convenient as to position, these rooms in the Buckingham Palace Road were terribly noisy, and perhaps this to some extent accounted for the insomnia which, though I have never been a good sleeper, I associate particularly with this period of my life. I saw much

of the magic of the dawn during the years I lived there.

What is the peculiar beauty that dawn lends even to things ugly in themselves? How often at daybreak in the summer, when I used to wander from one to the other of my four rooms, have I gone upstairs to the top window at the back of the house because of the dignity and mystery with which a line of dull, ordinary houses was invested by the dawn light! I do not forget, either, the sight of a splendid-looking young workman, spade over shoulder, wearing the L.C.C. uniform, with its rather picturesque hat, striding along the deserted road in the grey light of early morning, his footsteps the only sound in that one hour of silence between night and day. Seen in that strange mysterious half-light, his figure was curiously impressive.

The years I spent in that "upper part" in the Buckingham Palace Road were diversified by my visits to Italy, and by the usual number of parties in town, a considerable amount of theatre-going, meetings with old friends, and the making of new ones. But as I have done ever since I began to write, heaven knows how many years ago, I always kept the morning hours for work.

The mention of theatre-going reminds me of the exciting experience of "first nights" of the plays of Somerset Maugham, and of certain delightful supper-parties he gave after the first performances of two of these at the Bath Club (if my memory serves). The first of the supper-parties, I think, was at a time when he had four plays running simultaneously at London theatres. But both parties included certain members from all the casts of each play (Marie Tempest and Lottie Venne among them), as well as other friends of his unconnected with the stage. They were very gay, and great fun.

It was while I had those rooms in Buckingham Palace Road that I met Thomas Hardy. His secretary introduced herself to me one day at the Lyceum Club in Piccadilly, and I remember going to dinner at her home somewhere a few miles out of London, and afterwards to some club in the neighbourhood in which her father was interested. On the strength of my acquaintance with his daughter he had written to ask if I would read one of my own short stories there, and in a rash moment I had consented. I recall a badly lighted, dreary little hall, and a very uninspiring audience. But I had been interested previously in what Hardy's secretary told me about her work with the great novelist, for whom she was anxious to find a *pied à terre* in London, and when I mentioned that I should shortly be going to Italy, she asked if I would let my rooms to him. A little later she invited me to tea at the Lyceum Club to meet him.

He was very different from the man I had pictured as the author of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. It was a little, slight man with a fresh-coloured, rather sad face who was introduced to me—very much taken in hand and “run,” I thought, by the efficient, business-like young woman, the hostess of the occasion, and the future Mrs. Thomas Hardy. His first wife was still living at the time.

We spoke of my rooms, which I said I should be more than willing to let to him, though he must, of course, first see whether he liked them, and as he was to be in town for a few days, I asked him and his secretary to Buckingham Palace Road. They came. Hardy seemed pleased with the place and said it would suit him admirably if he should find it possible to live in London for a few months. But of that he was by no means sure.

When we had finished this tentative business discussion I tried to make him talk about interesting

people he had known before my day. I remember asking him about the Brownings, and trying to get him to describe them. I confess I found his replies disappointing. He seemed to have no gift for making one *see* the men and women under discussion. But I liked him. He was gentle and simple, and there was no trace in his manner of feeling himself a celebrity.

In talking of *Jude the Obscure*, I said I had always wished the last words in that harrowing story had been spoken by the sympathetic little widow and not by the coarse-grained, horrible Arabella. He replied rather animatedly, "Well now, it's strange you should say that! I hesitated for a long time whether to give them to her, or to the widow Edlin." He seemed interested to hear that my mother was a West-country woman, and that I recognized many of the words and phrases she used—generally in fun, but sometimes naturally—in the talk of his country folk. I asked if those words and phrases were still current in the West Country, and he regretfully shook his head. They were fast dying out, he told me. Even the pretty word *maid* for *girl* which my mother often used ("There's a good maid!" "What's the matter with the maid?") one heard less and less frequently. The language was becoming stereotyped.

He referred to my West Country origin in two very pleasant letters I had from him later, the first one to explain why, to his disappointment, he could not take my rooms; the second containing an invitation to visit him "the next time you come to your native county—and mine."

I had yet another and more definite invitation to Max Gate after his second marriage, which I was in many ways sorry to refuse.

To write of Thomas Hardy, even so little as the fore-

going account, has set me recalling his novels, and though there is much that I love and admire in them, set me also thinking how probable it is that he, like Meredith, will be remembered as a poet rather than as a novelist.

Poetry is for Eternity, novels—even the best of them—for Time, and in spite of their greater lucidity, Hardy's novels, like Meredith's, deal with types of people doomed to be alien to future generations. Even his delightful country folk, if not so quickly as Meredith's sophisticated characters, will pass out of recognition when agriculture is as mechanical as it threatens to become.

Yet as I write this I am conscious of ingratitude, if not of impertinence. I think of certain wonderful passages in his novels. The marvellous thunderstorm in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the Harvest Supper in the same story, the lovely pastoral scenes in *Tess* come before me with a renewed sense of their beauty; and though I have always thought their author's outlook on life unreasonably pessimistic, my admiration is so great that I wonder I dare prophesy that his stories will not be so long remembered as I should like them to be.

Fortunately I love his poetry also—his and Meredith's—and I am glad and proud to have met the two great Victorian novelists and poets. As poets, to quote a line in one of Hardy's best-known poems, though he wrote it in a different connection, I believe they will be remembered "though Dynasties pass."

In imagination I see my simple but, I think, pretty little sitting-room of those days filled with people, many of whom are dead, though I am thankful for the continued friendship of others still in the same world with me. One who has left it, one who was almost my first acquaintance in London, is Mrs. Dawson Scott, the

founder of the P.E.N. Club, to which I still belong. She was that type of individual, more common in my youth than I think it has now become, known as a *character*. The wife of a doctor, she lived when I first knew her in a tiny house in Bennet Street, St. James's. At that time, though she was always intensely interested in literature and soon herself began to write novels (which are sufficiently remarkable to be better known than in fact they are), she scarcely knew any literary people. By the last year of her life she was in touch with hundreds of them all over the world, for the P.E.N. she founded has branches that extend to China, Japan, India, Iceland, to mention only four out of the forty-five affiliated centres of the International P.E.N. in as many countries.

To found such a club would be a great achievement for any woman, but particularly for one who started with no influence at all in the world of letters. She had, as may be imagined, tremendous driving force, energy that was truly phenomenal, and in view of the end she set herself to accomplish, the added advantage of never taking *no* for an answer!

People either hated or loved her. There was no middle way with "Sappho" Scott! I was always exceedingly fond of her, though I saw very clearly why she offended as many as she attracted. Anyone who forges straight ahead, ignoring every obstacle, is bound to trample upon the susceptibilities of many of her fellow-creatures, and "Sappho" Scott certainly did that!

But to those she liked, as I can testify, she was kindness itself, and the work she did was a great one. In the midst of the clash of conflicting interests, aims, and, to use a modern word which never fails to irritate me, *ideologies* of this chaotic world, it is something to have

forged the link between nations for which the International P.E.N. stands.

I quote a few lines from a speech delivered at one of the dinners by H. G. Wells (President of the London P.E.N. from 1933 to 1936):

We of the P.E.N. are united upon this fundamental thing. We stand for faith in the freely-thinking, freely-speaking, freely-writing mind. . . . With an unassuming persistence, we in this Club work for open-eyed forwardism as distinguished from blind and tragic leftism, and blind rightism. . . . Faced with the uproar and violence of contemporary affairs, the P.E.N. Club . . . asserts its faith in the ultimate triumph of the free brotherhood of mankind.

Founded in 1921, its first President from that date till 1933 was John Galsworthy, O.M., followed by H. G. Wells from 1933-36, J. B. Priestley 1936-37. H. W. Nevinson is its president as I write, and the Hon. Member for England is William Somerset Maugham.

Distinguished names! And that their owners have consented not only to lend them, but as Presidents to work actively for the P.E.N. Club, is due to the initial activity of one woman, Catherine Dawson Scott.

In 1911, while I was still in Buckingham Palace Road, my brother Jack published the second novel he had written, *A Household Saint*, and either he, or I, sent a copy of it to Somerset Maugham, who spoke of it to me with enthusiasm, and wrote at length about it to Jack.

It was a wonderful letter for a young man to receive from such an authoritative critic. It did not spare the faults of the book, but it *did* foreshadow a great future artistic success for him if he could keep up the standard

set in this, his second novel. Jack was, of course, overjoyed, and I was full of hope that with such an incentive to work, his long spells of idleness would cease, and that he might gain sufficient control over his mental condition to enable him to write steadily. But it was not to be.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRE-WAR RUSSIAN BALLET: PLAYS AND PAGEANTS

I CANNOT leave the few last pre-war years without a mention of the Russian ballet, which I am glad to think I saw at its peak of perfection, with the wonderful Russian orchestra to accompany it, and the two dancers who for me remain unforgettable memories—Pavlova and Nijinsky.

There are beautiful dancers now—many of them—but the splendour of the Russian ballet that took the town by storm for a few years before the war that changed the world, is an experience that will never be repeated. I am glad to remember how many times I saw it, and from how many parts of the house—always with a different effect. Stalls, Dress Circle, Gallery, each presented a beauty peculiar to the position in the house of the respective seats.

But it was before the Russian Ballet in two senses “arrived” that I first saw Pavlova, when she danced with Mordkin in the lovely “Bacchanal” at the Coliseum. This duet was the apotheosis of youth and beauty in a Golden Age, when the world, like the dancers, was young.

Another beautiful thing I saw when Pavlova had a house in Golders Green, and gave a garden-party to which as a friend of one of her pupils I was invited. At that time she had a class for little girls at her own house. Grace Curnock (who had played Cupid in my *Enchanted Garden*) was one of them, and I occasionally went with her mother to see a lesson given. It was always an amus-

ing experience, for Pavlova spoke scarcely any English and usually addressed her pupils in French with a bewildering admixture of English words. But the children seemed to understand her, and if there was any difficulty she would appeal to Mrs. Curnock for an English translation.

"How you say *digne*?" she once called out to us as we sat watching.

"Dignified," replied Mrs. Curnock on the spur of the moment, and Pavlova, turning to the child whose entrance in a little scene she was correcting, exclaimed, "*No. No! Not so. Dat spoil your dignified!*"

But to return to the garden-party. The children of her class were to give a performance, but as few of the guests knew of this, many of them left without seeing it, their departure accelerated by a passing shower. So it was very late in the afternoon when, led by Pavlova and Mordkin as nymph and shepherd, a lovely procession of children emerged from a summer-house on to the lawn. Except for the briefest of gauzy tunics they were naked, each one carrying a different musical instrument—a little harp, a pipe, castanets—and to the sound of violins, the players concealed somewhere among the trees, they danced on the wet grass in the brilliant evening sunshine that followed the shower.

It was like some classical "Triumph of Spring," Pavlova and Mordkin as the lovers, surrounded by *amorini*. I am glad not to have missed that lovely sight!

Nor shall I ever forget another enchanting vision of child dancers. Long before Pavlova's little pupils recreated the Golden Age in a Golders Green garden, we had a glimpse of Arcady when Isadora Duncan brought a group of children from Austria to dance on a London stage. They were the loveliest little creatures

I ever saw, so beautiful that one felt they had strayed from another world where human beings had attained perfection of form and movement. When I think of them I recall with special vividness one scene inspired by Botticelli's "Primavera," when the figures in that well-known picture came to life, and one saw for a moment humanity as in its physical aspect it *might* be if the body were perfectly trained.

One other event, this time again connected with Pavlova, I must relate. My sister Nell, as enthusiastic as I was about her dancing, in collaboration with "Emile" (a friend of ours and of others who remember her beautiful dressmaking *salon* in Hanover Square), made a rest-gown to present to her. It was of jade-green silk, and in memory of one of the ballets in the *décor* of which they largely figured, Nell painted the sleeves and fronts of the gown with a design of butterflies and roses. After one of the performances the two went to her dressing-room with the gown, which Pavlova received rapturously. Kissing both of the donors she exclaimed, "I keep it *toute ma vie!*"

She was an enchanting little creature, and her dancing in the "Spectre of the Rose," when Nijinsky almost literally *flew* out of her dream, is something *I* shall keep, if only in memory, "*toute ma vie!*"

Most of the pre-war plays during my theatre-going years have become rather dim in my mind. There are exceptions, and, besides those of Somerset Maugham's, one of them is Laurence Housman's *Prunella*. I thought it a beautiful little play, and its charm was revived for me when I read some time ago the author's *Memoirs* and his mention of me in connection with the only favourable press notice after its first production. The critics, unused to fantasy, evidently did not know what to make of it,

and I do not forget the worried face of the dramatic critic of the *St. James's Gazette* when he turned to me after the performance.

"Now what on earth am I to say about this?" he asked.

"Say it's the loveliest thing you ever saw!" I returned enthusiastically, and the criticism that appeared supported that verdict.

The mention of Laurence Housman reminds me of another play of his—or rather of a translation—produced at the "Little Theatre" when the fight for Woman Suffrage (of which he was an ardent supporter) was raging, and the *Lysistrata* seemed appropriate! I went to see it by myself, and after the first act, like the talkative individual I am, I turned to the occupant of the next seat—a man—and began to discuss the play which, fortunately as it happened, vastly amused me.

"The translator is my brother," observed my neighbour, smiling.

"Oh! Are you A.E.?" I exclaimed, surprised and delighted. "When are we going to have another *Shropshire Lad*, Mr. Housman?"

He shook his head. "Never. That was"—he hesitated—"the spring time."

We *did* have another volume of his lovely if heart-rending poems, however, and I am glad to have spoken to their author, with whom, I may observe, I found it quite easy to get on, though he had the reputation of being "difficult." I never saw him again; and though in the old days I used to meet his brother Laurence frequently at parties—generally at the Dearmers, who were friends of his—it is many years now since I last met the author of *Prunella*.

He and "A.E."—both poets—had a perfect genius

for writing nonsense verse as well as serious poems, and in *The Unexpected Years*, Laurence Housman's autobiography, I was delighted to find that he quoted several perpetrated by his elder brother, so amusing that I laughed aloud as I read them.

As I write, a mention in to-day's *Telegraph and Morning Post* of Robert Farquharson as Herod in Oscar Wilde's *Salome* reminds me that my brother Jack and I saw this play when it was given at, of all incongruous places, the National Sporting Club! *Salome* was banned by the censor, and its performance some time in the early 'nineties was under private management. It was Miss Darragh, as I now remember, who played Salome.

Robert Farquharson's Herod, a wonderful piece of acting, stands out clearly in my memory, with the whole exotic atmosphere of the play as a somewhat hazy background. I remember the two tripods, one on either side of the stage, from which the faint smoke of incense arose to enhance that atmosphere, but at the time I was too intent upon the play to pay much attention to the audience. Some weeks later, when I happened to see a letter which a young man, out of town when *Salome* was given, received from a friend of his who had been present at the performance, I realized that subconsciously I *had* been aware of its peculiar character.

"You ought to have seen the audience," wrote my friend's correspondent. "The men all women, and the women all worse!"

A witty exaggeration—or at least I hope so! But for a long time afterwards I was teased by the recipient of the letter about the "jewelled dagger" which he was sure I must have worn in my hair!

My friend Mary Connard was a pioneer in the production of the open-air plays that, in spite of the vagaries

of our climate, have become so popular. I have seen many pageants and pastorals since *The Awakening of Pan*, which she wrote and, with her sister, Mildred Collyer, produced in the grounds of the Chelsea Art Club, but few more charming. Seated behind me at its first performance were two ladies discussing the sculptured figure of Pan, which stood on the verge of the grassy stage.

"It's not very life-like, is it?" remarked one of them (presumably on bowing terms with the god). "Borrowed from some studio, I suppose."

"Fancy getting a heavy thing like that all the way here!" exclaimed the other.

The play began, and I, with "inside knowledge," waited gleefully for their exclamation of surprise when the figure moved, stepped off its pedestal, and Pan, alias George Lambart (the father of Michael the sculptor and Constant the musician), began to speak.

Herrick in Love was another delightful play written by Mary Connard, arranged by the sisters, and acted in various gardens. Later, pageants, some of them not too well managed, became rather boring in their frequency, but one of them, performed in those grounds widely known as the scene of the Chelsea Flower Show, I remember, because I so frequently met Charles II in Sloane Street! The actors and actresses had formed the agreeable habit of strolling about in costume before and after the "show," and Tom Heselwood was so like the Second Charles that I feel I have actually *met* that witty, talented, humane monarch, very inadequately described as "merry."

To-day we have an Open-air Theatre putting plays on for a run through the often ironically named "summer months." Yet when "God sends" a *warm* as well as "a cheerful hour," I can imagine nothing lovelier than

a ballet, or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, given on such an idyllic stage, with whispering trees as accompaniment to lovely words and lovely movements under a star-filled sky.

The faithful, with astonished scorn, may remark that in connection with the theatre, I, who witnessed the rise to fame of Bernard Shaw, was present as a girl at the first performance of *Arms and the Man*, have since seen all or nearly all his plays, read reams of enthusiastic criticism, and listened to no less enthusiastic talks about him, should not so far have mentioned a dramatist who to many glorifies the English stage.

Quite simply, the reason is that with the exception of *St. Joan*, and even that, for me, spoilt by the epilogue, I dislike the plays of Bernard Shaw. I mean just that. I dislike them. But that does not mean lack of appreciation of their cleverness, of their wit, of their technical ability, of their dramatic excellence as a whole. It simply means that I personally find, and have always found, them boring—in the sense that as a child I was bored by the harlequinade that made an anti-climax to the glamorous transformation scene. How well I remember the sinking of my heart when I heard the facetious shout, "Here we are again!" as the clown tumbled on to a stage from which all the light and colour and romance had fled.

Rather in the same way a Shaw play to me is always more or less of a harlequinade with a mocking house-breaker as the clown. Bernard Shaw is the world's most skilful housebreaker. He is not and probably does not aspire to be anything of an architect. No one so well as he, to a witty song and dance accompaniment, can pull down. But what in the place of those temples in the House of Life (some of them jerry-built, I admit) so

gleefully destroyed by him does he propose to substitute?

Apparently nothing. That is not his concern. He is content to be a housebreaker, and on the whole I am glad, for I know I should not like any "design for living" planned by Bernard Shaw!

CHAPTER XVIII

SOHO SQUARE

IN 1913 I joined an already mentioned friend, Mollie Clugston, in a flat she had recently taken. It was in Soho Square, on the third floor of a house that, with what truth I do not know, was said to have been part of the French Embassy at the time of the Revolution of 1789. My friend took it from O. P. Heggie, the actor, who on account of ill-health was leaving London. It was he who had decorated the largest room, with its crescent-shaped window overlooking the Square, in the style of an early Victorian inn-parlour. It had one of those golden-yellow mottled papers that one so often sees in the coffee-rooms of inns of that period, and an arched fireplace with a wide, tiled hearth. At the end of this long, low-ceiled room a door led through a lobby (with deep cupboards on either side in the thickness of the walls) into a charming parlour with the large white-moulded panelling characteristic of the Queen Anne period. Another entrance from the passage outside made it quite independent of the big room, and it was only when we gave parties that we opened the communicating doors. At such times the panelled parlour, my own private sitting-room, with its flowered chintz curtains at the two windows, formed a gay antechamber to the more austere and dignified room belonging to my friend.

I have had many homes in London, but none of them so unusual, distinguished, and delightful as that flat in Soho Square—now gone the way of hundreds of other survivals from the eighteenth century. Certainly it had its disadvantages. To reach it one climbed an ugly

staircase whose walls and shabby linoleum-covered steps were dingy enough. Beneath it, on the ground floor in our time, there was a wholesale cheese shop, and when a fresh consignment of Camembert arrived, we were fully aware of the occurrence! But the smell I detested even more than the cheese smell came from Crosse and Blackwell's jam factory on the east side of the Square. Fortunately its chance to reach us depended on the way of the wind, which was not *always* unfavourable to us. But the charm of the place outweighed these olfactory nuisances, which after all were intermittent, and never penetrated into my parlour at the back of the house.

Several years ago now, I walked through Soho Square one day when the house was partly demolished, and through great gaps in the outside wall of my parlour saw the calm blue sky that over-arches the scenes of all the follies perpetrated by men—from a battlefield or a bomb-shattered town to the rubbish heaps to which they reduce the beauty in cities, and the hideous bungalows, petrol stations, and hoardings which deface the green countryside of England.

The firm of Gill and Reigate now has showrooms for furniture in the building that has gone up on the site of the old house which, even when we knew it, had long been only *part* of the original structure.

Some time before the war I went into their shop in Oxford Street just round the corner, and the courteous manager to whom I was talking, interested to hear where I lived, explained that in the eighteenth century the house was built round a courtyard of which the modern premises of Gill and Reigate formed one side, and our house the other. He took me upstairs to a large room on the top storey and showed me long rows of wooden stands where, he said, the disabled soldiers after the Napoleonic wars used to spread out for sale the toys,

the models of ships, and so forth that they had made to supplement their scanty living. No doubt that pathetic reminder of "battles long ago" has also disappeared. There have been more recent battles since I saw those wooden stands, and other soldiers in other ways have tried to earn something more than a bare sustenance.

From the windows of that top-floor room, as also from those of my own parlour, one looked down upon what must once have been the courtyard of an imposing building, then and perhaps still filled with dingy glass-roofed structures used, I suppose, as warehouses.

Before long—for already since I lived there it is changed—Soho Square, the centre of a most interesting neighbourhood, and once in the seventeenth and eighteen centuries London's fashionable quarter, will be as unrecognizable to the older generation as Berkeley Square, famous in eighteenth-century days, is becoming, if it has not already become. Even while I lived in Soho I saw the destruction of a fine old mansion in Dean Street, close to the Royalty Theatre, once owned by Sir James Thornhill. Frescoes painted, as when I once went over the house I was told, by Sir James, who was Hogarth's father-in-law, covered the staircase walls, and I have a dim recollection of dignified, empty rooms and a clearer one of the massive bar of iron that secured the hall door, a necessary precaution doubtless in the days of streets dimly lighted and unpoliced.

A house close to that in the south-east corner of the Square, known as the House of Charity, belonged to the then Vicar of St. Anne's, Soho, and I once entered it to return the call of his wife (the only time, by the way, that a clerical call has ever been paid me in London). To my surprise and interest I found the walls of the drawing-room decorated with medallions painted by Angelica Kauffmann. How I longed to have the fur-

nishing of that beautifully proportioned room, suffering, as I felt it must do, in silent patience, the bamboo fern-stands and the modern chairs and sofas of a quite peculiar hideousness! Carlisle House, at the end of a short street leading from the west side of the Square, always interested me because it is that one introduced by Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*, from which the sound of footsteps is heard incessantly passing. I have been told that this is still its peculiar form of "haunt"!

Beauty and interest apart, the destruction of so many London buildings of historic or architectural interest is surely intensely foolish, even from a commercial point of view? What do thousands of Americans, for instance, come to London for, if not to see with their own eyes the seventeenth and eighteenth century parts of the city of which they have read, and in which possibly some of their forbears lived? They must come quickly if they wish to find even the little of it that is left!

As I write these words, on a page of *Country Life* for April 1938 open at my side, I see verses reproduced from *Nine Sharp* by Herbert Farjeon, a revue now running at the Little Theatre, and with his kind permission I quote a verse of the lines he puts into the mouth of an ironical housebreaker. One man at least, with vehemence equal to mine, hates the folly and the vandalism that is daily going on in one of the most interesting cities in the world. The housebreaker speaks:

"Pulling down London, smashing up the town,
That is the life for me,
A-breaking up of beauty and a-knocking of it down,
Under the sky so free;
So whack that roof and bang those walls
And scatter the old brick bats,
And down with the Adelphi, and the Temple and St. Paul's,
And up with the service flats.—By Gee!

Yes, up with the service flats !
Sir Christopher Wren was all right then,
But he ain't no great shakes now,
So drill that drill, my lads, until
You can't see the dust for row.
Oh, the face of the world is changing fast,
But only fossils want things to last,
So shiver the foundations and blast the past,
Pulling down London town."

This "housebreaker" then goes on to remark in equally pungent verse what shrieks of indignation would be heard if enemy bombs had destroyed what we ourselves are ruining!

Twenty years ago and more I wrote a book for children, called *Magic London*. Its title will soon be as ironic as the plaint of Mr. Herbert Farjeon's housebreaker. "Magic" London has almost ceased to exist.

Apart from its historical interest (one thinks of the great house built by the Duke of Monmouth, the much-loved illegitimate son of Charles II, which once filled the south side of Soho Square; of the famous Assembly rooms established by Mrs. Cornelys in the eighteenth century among other stately houses) the whole atmosphere of Soho when I lived there was different from every other part of London—the foreign element being much more pronounced than it is to-day. And I am not thinking only of the French and Italian grocers' shops filled with strange cheeses and liver sausages, or the tobacconists, with their *Caporal* cigarettes—for many of these shops still remain. It is the *people* who have changed. To walk through the Soho market before the war was to imagine oneself in a foreign city. There were the same kind of awning-covered booths one sees in any French provincial market town, and though their proprietors spoke English, it was often with a foreign accent, and they always addressed one as *dear*. "*Only a penny, dear!*" "*Look, dear!*"

A lovely bunch, only twopence, dear!" Where else in London would it have been possible to see, as I once saw, four or five butchers singing and dancing outside their shops and marking the rhythm of the dance by the clashing of their knives?

I think I must have watched the last "Jack in the Green" ever to appear in London, dancing clumsily in his bell-shaped green sheath one May morning, as I walked through Soho Square! It was a sight that reminded me of the May mornings recorded by Pepys in the seventeenth century, when the milkmaids wreathed their pails with bluebells and Mrs. Pepys went out to wash her face in may dew.

Coming in thought to more modern days, I recalled the beautiful garlands which, when we lived at Warnham Place, the village children used to take round on May Day, collecting pennies as they went from house to house showing them.

Why must all these pretty customs die? I know they are still observed in certain schools, but I'm afraid a trifle self-consciously—as a "survival" rather than as a familiar natural ceremony.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE

I COME now to the very last of my theatrical ventures.

Just as many years previously I wanted to start a magazine after my own heart for children, so in 1913 I wanted a theatre for them in which plays likely to appeal to the kind of children who then existed should be given at the Christmas, Easter, and summer holiday times. It seemed to me a pity that they who so love acting should have nothing but the pantomimes to gratify their love for drama, and it was a dream of mine to start a theatre exclusively for them. I talked over the idea with Mabel Dearmer, who had produced several plays for children in the hall connected with what was then her husband's church, and these discussions led to the acquisition of the Court Theatre for a month of the Christmas holidays.

I confess that the decision was against my better judgment, for I had in mind some hall with a platform large enough to be transformed into a stage, and an auditorium of a size better suited to little voices than that of a theatre. However, there were difficulties in the way of this less ambitious idea, and the Court Theatre was eventually taken.

Mabel Dearmer's full-length play was called *The Cockyolly Bird*, and we arranged that this and my "Triple Bill" of three short plays should be presented on alternate afternoons throughout the month of January.

But first, we had to catch our children, and this we did by advertising for them. Then came the task of

choosing from among the troops that arrived, escorted by mothers, most of whom, needless to say, imagined their offspring the world's greatest geniuses. We held "auditions" two or three times a week in the big room of the Soho Square flat, which my friend Mollic Clugston, who was out most of the day, kindly allowed me to use.

I chose the plays for my "Triple Bill" from three volumes of fairy plays of mine published by John Lane, and it was one of these, *The Enchanted Garden*, that I, and several other people, have cause to remember for reasons other than any connected with the stage, because Elaine Stanford, the little girl who at the age of ten was my "leading lady" in that tiny play, is now my niece by marriage.

Most of the children who came as the result of our advertisement were destined for the theatrical profession, and were already at various dramatic schools. Elaine was one of the few exceptions. Perfect strangers to me as she and her mother were when I first saw them at the flat in Soho Square, their lives have become interwoven with mine and with my sister's son, Philip Buttar. Now Lieutenant-Commander in the Navy, and the father of two little girls, in 1913 he himself was a child when he saw my plays at the Court Theatre during one of his Christmas holidays.

Fate evidently took a hand in my little dramas and turned them to better account, so far as he and Elaine were concerned, than either of them could possibly have guessed when my nephew (at the Eton collar stage of his existence) saw across the footlights a little girl in socks and strapped shoes running on to the stage with a big doll in her arms!

As I foresaw, in spite of the splendid notices accorded

to the alternate matinées of Mabel Dearmer's *Cockyolly Bird* and my "Triple Bill" (and indeed they were both charming entertainments), we made no money, for the expenses of the theatre swallowed up any chance of profit which a simpler form of presentation might have given them. But the children were adorable, and even those with no previous theatrical experience acted with the poise and assurance of veterans!

"You're never going to leave those babies alone upon the stage!" I remember my sister Nell exclaiming when the curtain went up on *The Fairy Doll* at the first matinée, to disclose two tiny girls playing with a dolls' house, and though I could scarcely do otherwise, I understood the amazement that prompted the question. At that time, ten was the age at which children were allowed to act in public, and in my little plays no one over fourteen appeared, and most of the actresses were under twelve. The terrible fear of all of them was that for some reason or other they might not be "passed" by the Licensing Board before which they had to appear, and I remember with hilarity Elaine Stanford's reply to one of its members who asked her age. "I'm ten—and in *perfect* health," was her prompt, emphatic reply. Like all the rest of the children, she was keen and enthusiastic enough to have rehearsed day and night if it had been allowed, and indeed for me also the rehearsals were a never-failing delight.

My friend Mildred Collyer designed and made all the charming dresses for two out of the three plays, and "Sheba," of Sloane Street, most generously "dressed" *The Enchanted Garden*. Her "Cupid," with wings of real pink-tipped feathers, and the dress of the "Pink Shepherdess" were lovely creations.

How mercifully unaware was every one connected with "The Children's Theatre" that January of 1914

THE CHILDREN'S THEATRE

that by the end of the year such things as children's plays would have no place in minds occupied with less innocent matters!

The day before the run of the matinées began we had an opening ceremony, organized by Mabel Dearmer on the lines of that one for the Fresh Air Fund already described, and Ellen Terry consented to be its presiding genius. It began with the presentation to her on the stage of a bouquet offered by a pretty little boy, to whom in accepting it she made a lovely, sweeping curtsey.

In a little speech, she wished The Children's Theatre good luck, and then went to her box to watch the variety entertainment that followed. Certain children, most of them to appear next day in one or other of the two casts, sang, danced, or recited. Among them, though he was not in either of the plays, was a boy dressed as a pierrot, who sang clever little verses about animals (words and music composed by himself). His name, heard for the first time by me and many others, was Noel Coward.

The middle item in the Variety programme was a tiny play of mine (not included in the "Triple Bill") called *In Arcady*, and just before the curtain rose, Ellen Terry, leaving her box, wandered into the stalls, which were packed. She was recognized by several people, but it was one of my sisters who had the sense to jump up quickly and offer her own seat. Smilingly waving aside half a dozen other belated offers, she sat through the performance of *In Arcady*, which played less than twenty minutes.

"Perfectly charming!" she exclaimed when the curtain fell.

"I'm so glad you think so, because my sister wrote it," Georgie told her.

"Then give her this message from me—that she's written an ideal play for children," returned Ellen Terry.

I am very proud of that little tribute from the most fascinating woman I have ever seen on the English stage.

One day, at the end of the run at the Court, a friend asked me which of all the children I thought would be heard of again? My selection was Noel Coward, Fabia Drake, and (as a dancer) Ruth French. The latter, then a child of ten, and so far taught only by a local dancing mistress, was the Pink Shepherdess in the little play praised by Ellen Terry, and (because she was brought to me only when the best parts had been given to others) Fabia Drake had only a sentence or two in my plays, I had been struck by the intensity she brought to them. Even the few minutes he was on the stage had been sufficient to impress me with the cleverness of Noel Coward. It was not such a bad forecast on my part of future "stars," I like to think!

With "The Children's Theatre," which I once hoped to make a permanent one, my theatrical activities ended. Between the production of the "Playgoers' Play" and my "Triple Bill" at the Court (if I omit one or two matinées of children's plays), two one-act plays of mine were, indeed, performed in London theatres. But though they had some little success, they were short-lived, for in each case the plays to which they acted as curtain raisers ran for no great length of time. One of them was spoilt by being cut down from three acts to one to please some manager who would not otherwise take it. As a comedy dealing with woman suffrage (the burning topic of the day at the time it was written) it was much better in its more extended form, but even in the abridged edition, if Madge Titheradge, who was in the cast, had been given the chief part, it would have gained immensely.

Probably, and quite rightly, she shared my opinion, and this may have accounted for her somewhat impish behaviour during rehearsals, which were conducted by that fine character actor, Norman MacKinnel.

"That's a naughty girl!" he remarked one day as I sat beside him in the stalls. "Clever as a monkey, though. What she wants is a husband who'll stand no nonsense. A brace of twins wouldn't do her any harm, either!"

There was a twinkle of amusement in his eyes, in spite of his exasperation with the vagaries of the very pretty dark girl whose name I then heard for the first time. Later, through Henry Daniell and his mother, friends of hers and mine, I knew her fairly well, and I always regretted that she had no chance to exercise her great gift for comedy in my poor, badly cast and badly treated little play—the last of my efforts at playwriting for a grown-up audience.

The war came, and after it I lost all interest in writing for a new generation of children who knew not Joseph.

But the little plays—three volumes of them—already published by John Lane were, and still are, frequently, and I may add often abominably, acted by people who seem to have no conscience about an author's work, which without permission they will alter to suit their own convenience and produce disgracefully.

Two flagrant instances of this recur to me.

By the merest chance, years ago, I saw a paragraph in some paper announcing that the Princess Royal (then Princess Mary) was to attend a fête at the Botanical Gardens "for which a special play has been written by Netta Syrett." It was produced, the notice continued, by some titled lady, whose name (perhaps fortunately) I forget.

I wrote her an indignant letter, asking what the paragraph meant, and no doubt reluctant to face me herself,

she sent her secretary to "explain." There was, of course, nothing to explain, except that without permission she had rehearsed the little published and licensed play *In Arcady*. The secretary assured me that it had not been altered in any respect whatever, and as the fête was imminent, begged me to allow its performance. Foolishly I consented, and at the last moment her employer sent me two tickets for the performance. I went—to see a ridiculous travesty of the little piece, so atrociously acted as to be incomprehensible, and instead of the procession of tiny shepherds and shepherdesses that should have ended it, large-sized children in parti-coloured pyjamas performing a jazz dance!

Another, and even more flagrant instance of this kind of impertinence, was a performance of *The Dream Lady*, of which I knew nothing till *after* the matinée. It was so bad that friends of mine who, imagining, of course, that I had passed it after witnessing rehearsals, decided not to tell me they had seen it, in order to spare themselves the embarrassment of making insincere remarks. The people responsible for this outrage had substituted a dancer for the chief character, pulled the play to pieces to suit their actresses, and printed my name in large letters on the playbill outside the theatre. All this without a word to me on the subject!

The proceeding was, of course, actionable, and I suppose if I had been sufficiently public-spirited I should have taken it into court, if only for the sake of others whose work might be similarly treated. But litigation is costly, not only in terms of money, but in agitation of spirit, as doubtless those unscrupulous enough for such behaviour are well aware.

It is a curious fact that though *after the event* I have heard of numberless more or less public performances of these little plays of mine, never have I received an invita-

tion to witness one of them. Without being unduly suspicious, this seems to point to an unwillingness on the part of their producers to let the author see a travesty of what she has written. Does it ever occur to such individuals, I wonder, that an author has a certain literary reputation to maintain, and that this may not be enhanced by a thoroughly bad performance—I will not say *even* of a children's play, because I have tried to put as good work into what I have written for them as for grown-up people—but for a travesty of *any* play, however simple?

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

IN the early summer of 1914 I joined my mother in Switzerland, where for some weeks she had been staying at Glion, above Montreux. She loved travelling, and after my father's death she went several times to the Riviera, and lastly to Switzerland, alone, thoroughly enjoying the visits and all her experiences by the way. I am glad to remember that I was with her when war broke out, for though she had plenty of courage, without me the return journey would have been even more difficult than it was.

But war was far from the thoughts of either of us when she met me at the little station at Glion one radiant June morning of that fateful year.

I have said little of my mother except, I think, that she possessed that elusive quality we call charm. Hers is not an easy character to describe, and as I find the ruthless analysis of parents by their children distasteful, I do not propose to make any attempt to do so.

She was a very pretty woman, and I have two vivid memories of her, which hang like portraits in my memory—one as she looked in her youth, the other as she appeared standing on the platform of the little station at Glion, scanning the carriages as they slid past her when the train in which I was travelling came in.

I was such a small child when my mind registered the first impression of her, that she must have been quite young. I see her standing at the top of a flight of steps, somewhere away from home, drawing on her gloves—a slim girl in a full skirt and short jacket, wearing a hat that

dipped in front, had a wreath of cherries upon it, and long streamers of rather narrow black velvet hanging at the back.

In the other picture she appears as an old lady indeed, but a fresh and beautiful old lady, with snow-white hair under a shady hat, and eyes blue as forget-me-nots, lighting up at the sight of me. She had an amazingly strong personality, and a faculty for unconsciously racy comment. I think how often now, we—my sisters and I—quote her sayings, which *she* only recognized as amusing when we laughed, and repeated them.

We spent some weeks at the delightful hotel, the Victoria I think was its name, above the Lake of Geneva, and then went on to a little place higher up in the mountains. Here we stayed in a simple but clean hotel where there were a considerable number of Germans. We had no English papers there, and the last I had seen at Glion were full of accounts of suffragette riots, and of trouble in Ireland. But I was too delighted with the mountains, the pine woods, the sunshine, to trouble about newspapers and politics. The days slipped by peacefully, and no hint of gathering war clouds reached us.

There were no separate tables in the dining-room of the rather primitive hotel, and at the long table at which we took our meals our next and opposite neighbours were Germans, all of whom spoke English very well. One day at *déjeuner*, it must have been about the first of August, a waiter hurried up to the man who sat opposite me to say he was wanted on the telephone. Rising quickly, he left the room and was a long time coming back. When he *did* come, I glanced at him and saw an expression on his face which instantly made me apprehensive and increased the dislike I already felt for him. I can only describe it as a look of excited, satisfied malice.

He said nothing, nor did his wife, who was next to me, make any inquiry. There had been vague rumours of trouble between Austria and Serbia, to which I had paid little heed, but suddenly I turned to the wife and said lightly, "You Germans are not thinking of going to war with us, are you?"

She laughed. "What an idea! Our Kaiser would never dream of such a thing. He loves peace."

She was, I am sure, perfectly sincere. The "Küche, Kinder, Kirche" type of German woman before the war knew nothing of politics. What she *did* know was that she mustn't worry her lord and master about things decided by him to be beyond her comprehension.

That night at dinner this typical German wife said to me, "Mamma is really ridiculous! She's been packing up to go home. She says I may laugh, but *she* remembers the Franco-Prussian war, and she insists upon leaving immediately."

Poor woman! "Home" to her, as I discovered, meant *England*, where she and her husband had lived for forty years!

A talk with the nice old lady after dinner, for which, occupied with her packing, she appeared very late, decided me that we should do well to return to the neighbourhood of railways.

"If there's war," she said, "trains will be packed with soldiers, and civilians won't count. I know. I've been through it once. I won't be caught again."

I still thought her an alarmist, but to be on the safe side I persuaded my mother to leave next day, and we went to *Montreux*.

There we found ourselves in an atmosphere of feverish excitement and uncertainty, till on the fourth we knew that war was declared between Britain and Germany.

An hotel acquaintance urged us to take advantage of

the Government trains that were being sent to fetch people caught in Switzerland, but I am thankful that after going to the station to look at one of them I refused, for later, stories reached us of whole day waits in some siding, while troop trains were going through, of the lack of food, and of terrible discomfort.

I could not risk such travelling, not only for my mother, but for two other old ladies (acquaintances we had made some weeks previously) who now rejoined us and looked to me to see them through. They were mistress and maid who had lived together for fifty years, both, I suppose, nearer eighty than seventy. With the trustfulness of children they put themselves in my hands, and only too thankfully left everything for me to arrange. Martha, the maid, was a dear, garrulous old thing, a survival from bygone years. Whenever she met my mother or me in the corridors of the hotel she dropped the little bob-curtsey she had learnt in youth and—how certain communists of my acquaintance would rage!—I heard her several times declare that she'd "rather serve the gentry for nothing than be paid ever so much to wait on jumped-up people." How terrible these same communists would find it that she adored her mistress—and was perfectly happy!

Fortunately my mother, who was anything but a trustful child, agreed with me that it would be better to wait, and eventually find our own way home.

So it happened that we saw the very beginning of the war.

We used to go to the *Place* at Montreux to watch the mobilizing of the Swiss soldiers who were to guard the frontier of their country. An officer seated at a table in the open air in the midst of the *Place* barked out unintelligible commands, in response to which men led horses away, or brought them up. Why or wherefore I did not know. But we grew accustomed to the sight of

marching men and to the sound of military commands. It all seemed fantastic and unreal to me. "*Give peace in our time, O Lord*"—that petition in the Church liturgy in my childhood had appeared so unnecessary. There was *always* "peace in our time," so why should we say anything about it? I used to think as the choir perfunctorily chanted the response. And now this "peace" was over—with what result few had as yet an idea. That was for later knowledge.

When I think of the month we spent in the hotel at Montreux, all kinds of incongruous memories crowd to my mind. Some are of Jack, who joined us there because of rumours that no money could be sent to Italy, and I thought it would be better for him to return with us to England till "this war," which every one said would be over in a month or two, should be ended.

All the hotels were packed with people like us, waiting to get away, but I managed to secure a small room for him in one close to ours. I met him at the station when, after an awful journey, he arrived at last, and waited in the hotel drawing-room while he had a bath and changed. When he came down the room was empty, so he went at once to the grand piano, which happened to be a good one, and began to play. At that time he played brilliantly, and after a minute, by twos and threes, people who were in the garden came in quietly through the french windows and sat down to listen. When he stopped, there was a great clapping of hands, and he turned in amazement to see a dozen or more people in the room. I remember feeling very proud! But as the years went on, his playing, like all his other gifts, deteriorated. It was his will-power that failed, making havoc of his life, and, alas, of all that he might have done.

As it happened, he need not have left Italy, or in a

week or two the chaotic state of money affairs that at first prevailed became more or less normal as between Italy and England. But we were glad to have him with us for a few weeks before we began our journey home, and he returned to Florence.

For it was a most harassing time. No one could get information about anything. Cook's bureau promptly closed after the declaration of war, and one didn't know how to get money, or to whom to turn for advice. We were lucky to be in French-speaking Switzerland, and our hotel manager was exceedingly kind in trusting English people for eventual payment; but I was worried to death about the best means of getting back. For nearly a fortnight no letters, no newspapers, arrived from England. At last one solitary *Telegraph* got through, and the fortunate recipient fastened it up on the passage wall outside the dining-room. I remember how we crowded round it, gazing half incredulously at the gigantic headlines that told of the invasion of Belgium, and the brave resistance of its people.

The heat day after day was terrible. I couldn't sleep, and I used to stand in my nightdress on my bedroom balcony, the flagstones of which, even in the middle of the night, were warm. I saw wonderful sunrises from that balcony, and at such times forgot my anxieties.

At last I felt we could wait no longer, if only because of the expense of hotel life, and I decided to go to Geneva, stay a night there, and take a train next day that went by a devious route to Paris.

At the Geneva station, when an hour before the scheduled time for the train's departure we arrived next morning, there was pandemonium.

Two Swiss soldiers, with crossed bayonets, guarded the staircase leading to the platform, on to which no one was allowed till the train came in. An ever-increasing

crowd surged in the ticket-hall, and I feared we should never find seats, even if we reached the train.

It was then that Martha's sudden burst of hysteria stood all four of us in good stead. Evidently overcome by the noise, the bustle, and her own fears, she flung her arms round one of the guardians of the staircase, sobbing out, "Oh, my dear, get us 'ome! Get us 'ome!"

And the bayonet-holders laughing and gallant rose to the occasion. Pointing to a bench at the head of the staircase, they let us sit down, explaining to the crowd behind that the older ladies were invalids. The moment the barrier was removed my mother belied their statements. Up like an antelope she leapt, and was down the stairs and into the train in a flash. She managed, moreover, to keep seats for Martha and Miss C., though most of the time I had to stand in the corridor.

I need not dwell upon the terribly long and trying journey. Thankfully at last we reached Paris, feeling we were considerably nearer home, and providentially unaware that the worst experiences were to come. We found a cheap, clean little hotel, and stayed there two nights, for I soon discovered there was any amount of red tape to be dealt with before we could get away, and I remember hours of waiting in queues for papers to be signed, for what reasons I entirely forget. All that part of the business I could do alone, leaving the others to rest, and it was after hours of this kind of thing that I went into one of the Duval restaurants for a cup of coffee. Except for the waitresses the place was empty, and I shall never forget the silence there.

Ordinarily there would have been incessant chatter among the girls. Now, they did not speak at all, and in the quiet, at intervals I heard the tramp of marching feet in the street outside. All of them must have had

fathers, brothers, lovers in danger, and their silence made me want to cry.

Next day the first bomb fell on Paris, with the same kind of effect that a stick stirring up an ant-hill produces. Every one who lived elsewhere determined at the same moment to leave the city, and my one idea was somehow to get to the coast with the three in my charge.

Railway time-tables had ceased to exist, but by chance I heard a rumour that a train for Havre would start about eight o'clock in the evening, and by seven we were standing in a dense crowd at the station. I have always been afraid of crowds. To me there is nothing more frightening than mass humanity. It becomes in my imagination like some wild beast whose actions are incalculable, and when there seemed a chance of a fight in that waiting throng, I became rigid with terror and apprehension for my three companions.

Only hand luggage was allowed, and a woman just in front of us carried the largest hat-box I have ever seen. Her neighbours complained that she was crushing them to death with it, and such furious back-chat ensued that I thought fists would soon supplement words. I knew Miss C. had a weak heart. She looked very white, and I thought, "If she faints, she'll be trampled under foot!"

My mother, on the contrary, was merely amused by the vivacity of the hat-box lady. No thought of danger occurred to her, and finally to my relief the altercation died down.

My next fear was that no train, whatever its length, could hold such a vast crowd, but when at last we reached the platform I saw that *two* parallel trains had been provided, and no one was left behind.

Another dreadful journey eventually landed us, almost

shaken to pieces (for all the couplings between the carriages were loose), about eight o'clock in the morning at Havre.

We had the whole day before us, for the boat, said to be the last one to leave for England—though that was a daily rumour and without foundation—did not start till ten at night, so we engaged bedrooms in a little inn near the harbour, and I persuaded my mother to lie down, while I wandered about and watched English troops marching in the town.

Outside our *estaminet* on the pavement there were the usual little tables, and at one of them sat four soldiers, three French and one English corporal, drinking light beer. I spoke to the Englishman, who asked eagerly if I could talk French.

"I want to explain something to these men," he said. "They *are* such good chaps, but we don't understand a word of one another's language!"

I sat down with them and managed to translate what my countryman wanted to say (it was about some theory of his as to where they were to be drafted) fairly well. He then talked to me about his wife and little boy, and gave me a letter which he begged me to post when I reached England. As I got up to go inside, all the four men rose. We shook hands, exchanged exclamations of *Vive la France!* and *Vive l'Angleterre!*—and I wonder if any of them ever saw their homes again.

I wrote to the wife of the English soldier after posting his letter to her in London, and had a charming reply from her, thanking me for the latest news of him. They were evidently a devoted couple.

It seems only yesterday that I was shaking hands with those soldiers at the beginning of "a war that was to end war"; and as I write, the papers are full of "grave situations," "disquieting incidents," "states of tension,"

and every country is feverishly piling up armaments. Will there ever be an end to the insensate folly of mankind?

While I live I shall remember the beauty of the harbour at Havre when at last, after troubles innumerable, we were on board the crowded ship that took us home.

It was a wonderful night of such brilliant moonlight as to dim the searchlights that played above the array of shipping in the harbour, and from every ship came the sound of excited cheering. A wonderful, unforgettable experience—almost worth the anxiety and fatigue of previous nights and days.

The war years began for me on that night, and it is only in retrospect that I realize how much more than the actual four years of its duration it took out of the lives of women of my age; of most women of my age, at any rate. In 1914 we felt young, full of energy, as ready for exertion and almost as unmindful of it as we were at twenty-five. By 1918, even for those of us who like me led a quiet existence and suffered no bereavement through the war, much of the spirit of youth had fled, and I fancy this was largely due to a prosaic physical cause—undernourishment. It was, as I remember, only when by chance I had a good meal that I realized how much I needed it, and loss of physical vigour meant a corresponding loss of the feeling of youth to me and my contemporaries. But that, after all, is so little a thing compared with the terrible suffering of thousands of other women as to be scarcely worth mentioning.

It was a changed world into which women of my age emerged after 1918, *how* greatly changed it took some time to discover.

THE WAR YEARS

But to return to 1914.

After a week or two of rest at "The Decoy," where life went on so much as usual that it was difficult to realize the war, I returned to the Soho Square flat and began to think what I could do to help.

I could not afford to do whole-time unpaid work, but fortunately my course seemed clear. I could turn my teaching experience to account, and take the place of some master in a primary school who wished to volunteer. Here was a very simple solution of the problem, and not for a moment did I think there could be any obstacle in the way. What follows seems so intensely stupid as to be scarcely believable, except that it had its counterpart in so much mad and bad organization during the war as to be a typical instance.

As a first step I went to a local centre dealing with elementary education, and was ushered into an office where a fat, exceedingly common-looking and, as I soon discovered, illiterate man, seated at a table, asked me impatiently what I wanted.

I told him.

"Well, 'ave you got the right certificates for teachin' in our schools?" he demanded. "'Ave you ever taught in them before?"

"No. But I am a trained teacher. I have taught in High Schools and I hold the Cambridge Certificate."

"That won't do. You 'ave to 'old the right one."

"But the Cambridge Certificate is a *higher* one than yours," I explained patiently. "It is the highest that exists."

"That don't matter. You've got to 'ave the *right* one."

"So you mean that a higher certificate than the one you are talking about disqualifies me?" I said, getting up.

"Yes, of course. If you 'aven't got the right one, you can't go in as a teacher. You can go as a pupil teacher, if you like," he shouted after me as I left the room.

I made no reply to this entrancing prospect, but angry though I was, I decided that as the man was obviously a fool I'd better write to headquarters. I did so, explaining the matter, and setting forth my qualifications, only to receive the curt information that as I hadn't the recognized certificate—I forget what it is called—the committee or council, whatever it was, couldn't consider my application.

Altogether as pretty an example of unintelligent administration as one could well imagine!

So, prevented by crass stupidity from doing the only thing of value I could do really well, except for a few hours daily at a sewing centre and a weekly "talk" at a Working Woman's Club, I was driven to go on writing novels. It seemed a futile occupation in the midst of a world war, but I'm glad to think of certain letters I received from men at the Front, perfect strangers to me, thanking me for the pleasure and distraction my books had given them. Such letters made me feel slightly less useless.

CHAPTER XXI

HAMILTON TERRACE

A YEAR passed, and then, owing to what I can only consider another stupidity on the part of authority, I was obliged to leave the Soho Square flat. The cheese shop on the ground floor was commandeered by the organizers of munition factories. Heavy machinery was installed in the vacated premises, and Belgian refugees were put in to manufacture shell-cases there. They worked all night, and the noise was insupportable. My bed used to shake under me with the vibrations of the powerful engines below, and sleep was impossible.

Once and once only I might have been glad of the presence, of the "hands" and then, as I need hardly say, they were not there! On Saturdays they did not work, and one Saturday night I happened to be in the house alone, my friend having gone for the week-end to her country cottage. An hour or two after midnight I was roused from much-needed sleep by the sound of guns.

I will not pretend that to be quite alone in a large house with an air raid in progress was a pleasant experience, and human voices below might have been comforting. On the other hand, if, as was quite possible from the look of some of the munition girls, these voices had been raised hysterically, I should have found the occasion even more trying, so perhaps all was for the best in the worst of all possible worlds!

Anyhow, alone, or in company, the air raid had to be endured, so I dressed to be ready for any emergency, and in the darkened room sat listening to the thunder of the guns. All at once they ceased. There was a silence which,

though probably lasting only a few minutes, I found interminable, and unable to bear the suspense, I switched off my one dim lamp, drew the curtains aside, and looked out. Suddenly the sky above the Square turned blood red, and simultaneously a roar that I shall never forget went up from the crowds that all over London must have been watching the doomed Zeppelin. If I had looked from a north instead of from a south-facing window, I should actually have seen it falling in flames.

That roar from thousands and thousands of voices was a most awe-inspiring sound, and in spite of the horror later expressed by people at the demonstration, to me it conveyed amazement rather than triumph over an enemy. The whole thing happened so swiftly that there could scarcely have been time for anyone to realize the terrible fate of pilot and crew, and I think the thunder of voices was the spontaneous reaction to an amazing spectacle.

At the time I could not imagine what had happened, for the crimson glare which I thought the reflection of some great fire faded too quickly out of the sky for this to be the explanation. It was only when I ran downstairs and out into the Square that I heard from excited people of the crash of the first Zeppelin to be brought down in the war.

Soon afterwards the L.C.C. pronounced the Soho Square house unsafe. Great cracks had appeared on the walls at the back, the whole structure had to be shored up, and for the Belgians other activities were found. It was, of course, ridiculous to put heavy machinery into a dwelling-house! But by that time I was in Oxford, where I lived for nearly a year with Mrs. Stanford and her two children, Elaine and Caerlyon, now the youngest captain in the Navy.

Beautiful Oxford was sad enough in those days, with

its empty colleges and its streets filled with disabled soldiers in the blue hospital dress. While I was there, Mrs. Stanford and I arranged a performance of my little play *White Magic* in aid of the Star and Garter Home for Incurables, to which we managed to send a cheque for a hundred pounds. Elaine, now between twelve and thirteen, was again my leading lady, and another girl who acted in the play, and has since become well known as a novelist, was Sylvia Thompson.

When I returned to town, for the first and only time in my life I spent a few months in an English boarding-house, and though I very much disliked the experience, I owe to it one more of the many friendships with which my life has been blessed. The only people who hadn't *boarding-house hack* stamped all over them were a mother and daughter who at meal-times sat at a small table near mine. They were both charming to look at, we quickly made friends, and I found that they were the mother and sister of Henry Daniell the actor.

Like me, and many others during those chaotic war years, they were at a loose end for a time, and while they considered the next move, had found the boarding-house a convenient halting-place. But after two or three months of a stultifying existence we solemnly agreed one day that if only to save our souls alive we must go! To be invited to discuss how many pieces of bacon Mr. Brown ate at breakfast, or whether Miss Jones was "making up to" Mr. Robertson, had palled upon us, and we decided to abandon these exciting topics and take a house together.

We found one that rather charmed us in Hamilton Terrace, St. John's Wood, and in the fullness of time moved into it.

But it was before we left the boarding-house that one

of the tragic events that happened in England during the war—the Silvertown explosion—very particularly impressed and horrified me because I knew the chemist at the factory in which it occurred. Though the boarding-house was miles away from Silvertown, the sound of the explosion reached us one evening with such violence that every one in the house thought an air raid was beginning. Windows and doors rattled, and from their rooms people who were changing for dinner ran out into the passages. Nothing further happened, and later in the evening we heard news of the tragedy. Only a few months previously, when I was in Oxford, Professor Angel had come for a week-end to friends of his, and of mine, there. At supper-time on Sunday he was describing the T.N.T. factory at Silvertown, and jestingly replied in answer to some question, “Oh, less than that would be enough to blow us all sky high!”

I don’t think it was ever discovered by what accident the light words spoken that evening came true, but I know he lost his life by heroically rushing from his office to warn the factory hands of an imminent explosion, and so saved many of them from a like fate. By the merest chance, his wife, who was doing welfare work in the same building, had gone home twenty minutes before her usual time, or the two little daughters would have lost both parents in that disaster.

Most of us, I suppose, when those war years come vividly to mind, as they have a way of doing at the most unexpected times and places, have certain memories that for some often quite inexplicable reason stand out from the rest. For me, one of them in the very early days has for setting Waterloo station, where I happened by chance to see the first German prisoners. A line of omnibuses filled with them was moving along the roadway that runs across the middle of the station, and on either

side of it stood a thin line of people, mostly women of the working class, watching in perfect silence.

A few of the men, lightly wounded, wore bandages on head or hands, but nearly all of them seemed to be unhurt.

"Most of 'em are coming 'ome, I expect," remarked a woman in front of me to her neighbour in a low voice.

The quietly spoken words breaking the silence made me suddenly realize the insanity of war. I knew what she meant. Till 1914 London had been full of German waiters, shopkeepers, artisans of all kinds, many of whom had married English girls and settled down among their English neighbours in perfect content—till all at once they were called upon to fight, maim, and if possible kill, people for whom most of them, far from cherishing ill-will, had nothing but liking, or even affection.

I looked at the dull, sullen faces of these prisoners as the omnibuses slowly passed, with pity for them, and a rush of anger against the war lords responsible for the sad, futile procession.

Another memory is again connected with a railway station.

I had been spending the day with my mother at Weybridge and was returning in the evening with an armful of flowers. All the way back to town from somewhere in the train I had heard the sound of singing, laughter, shouting, and as it drew in at Victoria Station, carriages at the back disgorged a stream of boys, some of them in khaki, most of them still in civilian dress. Cheering and shouting, gay, excited, happy, they surged round me with cries of, "Give us a flower, lady! Give us a flower!"

"We're Kitchener's army, lady!" cried a boy who looked about sixteen, eager-faced, madly excited.

I gave him a rose, which he proudly stuck in his coat, and put other flowers right and left into outstretched

hands before the whole crew rushed wildly down the platform and through the barrier, singing "Tipperary." I do not know why for twenty years I have remembered the face of the poor child who so exultingly cried, "We're Kitchener's army!" Perhaps because he symbolizes for me the holocaust of youth in that four years of insanity.

Another memory of a different kind, though it belongs to the war years, recurs to me as an example of that coincidence of which life is full, and fiction must disregard!

In 1915 my friends the Hannays took into their house a family of Belgian refugees, charming people of the educated class. One evening, when I was also staying there, Mrs. Hannay, who was reading *Vilette*, began in French to tell Madame (who spoke no English) something about the story because its setting was Brussels, the city from which she came.

"Why, I was educated in that school!" Madame exclaimed.

Further conversation revealed that a very old lady, the great-aunt of the then proprietor of the *pensionnat*—himself a Monsieur Héger—used to attend the prize-givings at the school, and that this old lady must have been the infant "Lucy Snowe" (alias Charlotte Brontë) mentions in *Vilette*. Nor is this the only unexpected link with the Brontë family that has come my way.

Once, many years before the war, when my sister Kate and I were in Brussels, we were travelling one morning on that railway which high above the old town encircles it. Opposite to us in the carriage sat a dark, heavily built man in early middle age, who no doubt because we were foreigners seemed interested in our conversation.

I had been speaking of the Brontës and wondering where in the depths below lay the rue d'Isabelle and the Pensionnat Héger.

"There it is!" suddenly exclaimed our neighbour,

pointing to a street above which the train was at that moment passing. "And," he added, "my name is *Héger*, and the school is now mine."

I cannot remember the exact relationship he bore to the Monsieur *Héger*—Paul Emmanuel in *Vilette*—with whom for a time Charlotte was so desperately in love, but he had evidently heard much about the two English girls, later to be famous, who had once been pupils at the *Héger pensionnat*.

Coincidence? I wonder! Does anything happen by chance? I have never been able to explain either my own or my brother Jack's preoccupation with that strange, uncanny Brontë family, with whom in life neither of us had any connection. Almost the last words my brother wrote, as I discovered when after his death his papers were sent to me from Italy, were notes referring to *Wuthering Heights*, and in *Angel Unawares* I connected him, as a child, with the genius who wrote that book.

Some months after my friends the Daniells and I had moved to the house in Hamilton Terrace, Jack wrote to say he could not keep out of the war any longer and was coming back from Italy. Though very troubled, for I knew he was not in a fit state of health to be in the Army, I felt I must not interfere.

He came and stayed with us for a day or two before going to a training camp. But, after all, he never went to the Front. His defective eyesight alone would have disqualified him for active service, and till six months before the end of the war, when he was invalided out, he remained in England as a private in the Army for Home Defence. He hated the life which, as I foresaw, did him a great deal of harm. Still he would not have been Jack if he had failed to get a certain amount of interest and amusement out of it, in spite of conditions, the lack of privacy in particular, which to a man of his temperament made life a hell. But

he liked some of the men, with whom he was evidently popular. One of his friends was a fish hawker from the Mile End Road, and his stories about him used to convulse me with laughter.

"Oh, for Gawd's sake, stop yer bloody west-end talk!" was this warrior's usual reply when Jack had teased him to the limit of the poor fellow's patience.

Another friend of his was the hero of a charming little book he wrote after his return to civilian life, and called *Alf, Old Chum*.

The war dragged on, punctuated for us at home with air raids, one of which, when bombs fell quite close to us, I remember with particular vividness. Mrs. Daniell's actor son Henry, who was then living with us, was playing in *General Post* at the time, and that night, as he was returning from the theatre, someone told him that Hamilton Terrace had been destroyed. He came in looking as white as a sheet, with fear for his mother and sister, even though on turning into the road he had seen all its houses still standing. As a matter of fact, such were the vagaries of air raids, though in roads farther from the explosion than ours much damage was done, not a pane of glass was broken throughout the whole length of the avenue in which our house stood. . . .

It was a very pretty house and I had a charming sitting-room, with two long windows, one looking upon the tree-lined road, and one at the other end of the room upon a strip of leafy garden. But the number of stairs and the lack of service in those days made it terribly difficult to manage, and my recollections of it are not of the pleasantest kind.

For one thing, if my rooms in Buckingham Palace Road years previously are associated with insomnia, the Hamilton Terrace house is for me the house of dreams—of dreams so vivid and amazing that even now when I recall

them I can scarcely disentangle reality from what most people would call fantasy.

I am aware of all the common-sense explanations that can be put forward to account for them—the strain of the war, lack of nourishing food, and so forth—but they do not cut much ice with me, because I have had, in quite normal conditions and at other times, dreams of the same curious quality, though I admit not so frequently as at Hamilton Terrace. Dreams are in the limelight nowadays, thanks to Freud, and more recently—and pleasantly—to Dunne, and that shall be my excuse for returning to them later. They can and probably will be skipped by those for whom they remain a tissue of nonsense. There may be others who, like me, are interested in theories about them.

In the twenty years which, however incredibly, have passed since Armistice Day, enough world history has been made of a kind to terrify any thinking man or woman, but my own personal history has gone the quiet way that I suppose falls to the lot of thousands of women of my age. There have been the dark shadows of sorrow that few of us escape—Death sees to that—but also stretches of pleasant sunshine along the path.

On the subject of the sorrows I will be brief. In 1923 my mother died; three years later, very suddenly, my brother Jack, and I mourn many dear friends.

Of my mother I am glad to think, even though she was not really fit to stand the journey, that her wish to go once more to the Riviera was gratified. I went out and returned with her after three months, spent first at Cannes, then at Mentone, and for a little while she seemed better for the change. She died five months later.

Jack, who had lived with her at Weybridge for some years after the war, returned later to Italy. He was in Siena when at eleven o'clock one night I received the

telephoned information that a cable addressed to me, too late for delivery, stated that my brother was dying of pneumonia. Another, early next day, brought the news that he had died at three o'clock that morning.

His last resting-place is the city we saw together for the first time—the city we both loved.

Before he left England he gave me the illuminated book on which at intervals he worked for years.

It is a kind of secular missal—a slight poem, written by Oscar Wilde, providing an excuse for lovely, intricate design and colour. I have watched him bending over it with all the patience and devotion that must have characterized a mediaeval monk working on one of those gorgeous missals that now lie, glass-protected, in the museums of European cities. I have in like manner protected the work of a modern illuminator, and Jack's book lies open under a glass covering on a table in my room. On one of the walls of the same sitting-room there hangs, framed, a piece of needlework designed and executed by him, a creation in which birds, roses, butterflies, and flowers make up a lovely fantasy.

"He is paying for his talents," Somerset Maugham once said to me when I was unhappy about so much that was wasted in the life of this gifted brother of mine. If fate had been kinder there should have been considerably more evidence of those talents than in fact remains, and no one knew this better than Jack himself.

But somewhere, somehow, I must believe, he is making good.

CHAPTER XXII

ITALY AGAIN

MY last visit to Italy, in 1924, was in so many ways unfortunate that in spite of the unforgettable beauty I enjoyed, I cannot count it a success. Though I knew Tuscany, I had never been in the South, and my niece and I planned a journey to Naples, Amalfi, and Capri. In studying a guide-book about Amalfi before we started, I came across a paragraph describing the last landslide that had occurred there. It ended with the remark that these catastrophes had a tendency to recur at intervals of twenty years, and a moment's calculation informed me that this was the year it was due!

Quite unperturbed, however, we started on the day arranged, some time in February, I think, and arrived at Naples in pouring rain. I remember that as I got out of the omnibus at the hotel the rug that I had put over my knees (for it was bitterly cold) fell, and went sailing off down a gutter that after days of rain had become a deep stream! It continued to rain. The sea was mud-coloured, the sky the same hue, and except for the last afternoon of the three or four days we spent in Naples there wasn't a gleam of sunshine, nor an inch of blue sky.

It was so depressing that I suggested we should change our plans and go back to Rome, where at least there would be pictures and other things to see under cover. But as we had both set our hearts on the coast scenery of Amalfi, and Barbara was optimistic about the weather, we decided to go on, and hope for the best.

It went on raining. Certainly every now and again, for a whole morning perhaps, the clouds would suddenly

lift, the sun come out, and then every one to whom that coast is familiar will know the loveliness that was revealed—the sapphire sea, the towering mountains, the ravines leading to little bays, the colour of the houses with their painted shutters, jade green, brilliant blue, yellowish pink. But even if the day was fine, every time I woke in the night it was to hear the thudding of violent rain on the terrace of our delightful pension, the Santa Caterina.

We owed our stay there to the introduction of the Baroness von Hutten, who happened to be at the Naples Hotel when we arrived. I had met her years previously, and thought her then one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen. Re-introducing myself, I found that she had just left the pension Santa Caterina at Amalfi, and though it was very full, she wrote a note to the proprietor to say that he *must* take us in, and so earned our gratitude. The little place—it was small then—though simple, was beautifully managed, and its proprietor well worth knowing, as later I had every opportunity to discover.

While we were there one of my married sisters, Mabel Rydon, and her husband came to Amalfi and stayed at the well-known Capuccini Hotel—once a monastery—with its hanging gardens so familiar in pictures. They arrived in a thunderstorm. The weather that year was most uncannily phenomenal, and I remember my sister's lively description of the ascent of the flight of steps, the only approach to the hotel—"pinned against the wall by the wind, and blinded by lightning flashes," she said.

However, though it continued to rain in torrents every night, the days became fine, and among other wonderful walks while my sister and brother-in-law were there, we went up to Ravello, that strange little town high on the mountains, with its interesting church and its exquisite views of the coast-line and the sea. In one

of the hotels with a garden that was like a carpet of flowers spread in front of it, I booked a room for the end of the month, intending to stay there for a week or two when my niece Barbara should leave to go on to Capri with her uncle and aunt.

We had driven up to Ravello because of the steepness of the winding road, but we walked back, and as the path zigzagged down through the beautiful ravine, all of us remarked upon the great fissures in the terraces where the lemons were grown. Gaps between them, caused by the subsidence of the soil, were frequent, and I can't imagine why people who lived on the slopes of those mountains and had experience of former landslides did not foresee the catastrophe. Perhaps they did, but could do nothing about it.

My niece left at the end of a fortnight to drive to Sorrento with my sister and brother-in-law on their way to Capri, and I was thankful to know she was safely at home by the time sensational news of the cloudburst and the accompanying landslide put English people in fear for the safety of their relations and friends.

I stayed on at the Caterina, where I had made pleasant acquaintances, intending in a few days to go to Ravello for a week, and then to Capri, where I should have met a friend, when "the blind forces of Nature"—as they have a way of doing—not only upset other arrangements than mine, but for some people put a stop to all future plans and arrangements for ever.

"I don't like this rain," said a woman who had lived in India, the evening before the catastrophe. "It's the kind of rain that in India meant landslides!"

For the past forty-eight hours the fine day-time weather had departed, and there had been incessant rain day as well as night.

That same evening, tired of the house, I had gone out

for a little walk between the deluges, and as I turned to go back, I gasped with horror at the sight of the mountains. Half-way down they were covered with ink-black clouds, from whose edges, like evil snakes, hung long, ragged fringes of an ash-grey colour of curiously dreadful appearance. I never saw anything so sinister, and with an absurd instinct to take cover, to get a roof over my head, I almost *ran* back to the pension.

All the evening the rain drummed on the terrace, and every time I woke in the night it was to hear the same steady thudding. Next morning the commotion and chattering in the house seemed louder than usual, but knowing how easily Italians raise a whirlwind about nothing, even when a maid dashed into my room with tea and toast and out again before I could ask a question, I was unperturbed. I had just finished dressing when one of my English friends knocked at my door to inquire whether I was "all right." Wondering why she asked, I went out into the corridor, where an unusual sound met my ears—the sound of rushing water.

"What's that?" I asked her, startled.

"Come and look!" she returned, and from another window I saw that the dry watercourse on one side of the house—a course empty of water for twenty years—was dry no longer! It had become a torrent sweeping down to the sea.

"A landslide and a cloudburst, they say," Mrs. Griffen went on. "And I hear we're cut off on both sides. Marooned!"

It was true. Between the pension and the town, as also on the road leading to the next village, tons of earth had fallen, breaking down the path. Fortunately the house stood on a rocky promontory jutting out into the sea, but the danger which, fortunately for them, few of the visitors realized, came from the terraced mountain at the

back. If these terraces gave way, thousands of tons of earth would have buried us.

That day all of us had reason to admire the behaviour of our *padrone*. He locked the hall door that opened on to the road and sternly sent the frightened, crying servants back to their work. Most of them had relatives living in the small villages near, and they were naturally wild with anxiety to rush out to see if they were safe. But this would only have put them in danger, and been of no help to their friends; so though we were desperately sorry for them, it was doubtless better for them to be occupied than to sit helplessly wringing their hands. And occupied our *padrone* saw to it that they *were*. He was like a little Napoleon, organizing, arranging, commanding; and that night dinner was not only served at ten minutes past the usual hour, but was as good as ever, and the dining-room, lit with candles stuck into bottles (for the electric light was cut off), looked cheerful enough.

But all day poor weeping refugees from isolated little houses on the mountain-side had come past the house. Some were taken in and fed, but most of them were looked after in the town, which, in spite of the headlines "*Amalfi destroyed*" in certain English and Italian papers, except for a mill on its outskirts, had suffered no damage at all. It was the mountain villages that were stricken; the one nearest to us through which I had walked almost every day was swept away, with the loss, I believe, of a hundred lives.

Most fortunately the telephone service to the town was still in working order. The only necessity the pension lacked for at least a few days was an important one—water, and this was brought in barrels, by sea, to the base of the rocky promontory. Somehow or other sailors managed to climb that rock with the great barrels on their backs.

As the road was impassable, the only means of leaving Amalfi was by sea, and for this escape we had to wait till soldiers, hurried from Naples, had cut a path down to the harbour. The two or three days of waiting were not pleasant, in spite of all the cheerfulness of our excellent *padrone*.

My bedroom, lighted by one candle, was depressing, and though I assured myself that if the terraces at the back *did* give way, we should be killed instantaneously, and probably know nothing about it, the reflection was not conducive to sleep, and I spent most of two nights standing at my window. It was reassuring to see a big ship, from which searchlights raked the coast, standing by. Every now and then one heard cries and shouting, and then a small boat would put off from the ship to rescue people who had somehow found their way to the sea, and were stranded on the rocky shore.

But what I most vividly remember of those agitating few days is the fall of the hanging garden of the Capuccini Hotel.

I think it was on the second afternoon that most of us, including the *padrone* whose name I wish I could remember, were in the *salon* that opened on to the terrace. Suddenly there was a muffled roar, and the *padrone* in the midst of a sentence stopped, and I saw him turn pale.

"That's the Capuccini!" he whispered.

Almost before the words were over his lips, a great wave of earth-scented wind blew into the *salon*, sweeping newspapers off the table and fluttering curtains, and in a moment or two, like a huge black snake unwinding its coils, we saw the earth brought down by the landslide, drifting with the currents far out into the sea, branches of trees and bobbing lemons floating on the surface of the dark stream.

Only a few days previously I had walked in that famous garden under a pergola of vines, with groves of lemon trees above, on a higher level, and a carpet of violets at my feet. Only two or three weeks previously my sister and her husband had been there, and I thanked heaven they were now safe in their English home. For it was not till the evening that we heard there had been no loss of life, and that except for the partial destruction of the outside stone staircase and one or two unoccupied bedrooms, little damage had been done to the building itself.

Most fortunately the annexe, a pavilion-like little building in the garden, generally full of people, this year owing to the bad season was empty. For that, too, went with the whole terraced garden into the sea.

I think it was late in the evening on the third day of our imprisonment that some men of our party came in covered with mud to say the road to the harbour, such as it was, had been cut. The mother and daughter with whom I had made friends and I had decided to go to Rome together as soon as we could leave, and early next morning we started, sailors having come to carry our luggage.

The road, hastily made, was very rough, and I had an awful moment when I found that in one place a plank over a raging stream had to be negotiated. I have no head for heights, but I knew that if I hesitated I should be lost, so I plucked up courage to go straight on. And after all it was not so bad, for two sailors, one on either side of the plank, helped me with outstretched hands and reassuring smiles (the English and the Italians are the two kindest nations in the world!), and I managed not to feel giddy.

The boat that was to take us to Salerno was crowded with refugees, most of them, poor things, in tears, and

all of them terribly seasick on the way. But it was ages before we started. The vessel had brought blankets and clothing for the homeless villagers, and all this had to be unloaded on the quay. Though the sun shone, the rain still fell in gleaming showers, and the blankets, imperfectly covered, must have been soaking wet before they reached the poor souls for whom they were intended!

From the deck of the ship while we waited we saw for the first time the devastation of the coast beyond the town. On the mountain-side there was only a sloping scar to mark the place of the hanging garden, and great heaps of soil lay piled at intervals across the road to the Santa Caterina. But no doubt by this time not a sign of the catastrophe remains, and though I have found no one to ask about it, I should not be surprised to hear that the "hanging garden" has been restored and perched as dangerously as ever on a mountain-side whose terraces are always liable to give way after weeks of heavy rain.

From Salerno, after a necessarily slow journey because of the dangerous state of the terraced hills, we reached Rome just before Easter, and thought ourselves lucky to get into a pension, for naturally the city was crowded. My bedroom—the only one available—overlooked a garage, where all night long cars were being repaired to the accompaniment of talk, whistling, and shouting. Are Italians ever quiet? Do they ever go to bed? *I* might just as well not have done so, for in that room I scarcely slept an hour during the night, and was therefore not in a very good condition for sightseeing in the daytime. But I had heard so much about the Easter celebrations in Rome that I felt that I must see some of them—and greatly disappointed I was when I did so. No service in any church began for at least an hour after the time stated, and the processions in St. Peter's

always had to struggle through a crowd of people and so lost all their impressiveness.

Possibly even the religious services are now regulated and efficient, but that Easter in Rome left me with a very poor estimate of Italian ability to stage ecclesiastical ceremonies. I had seen them infinitely better done in my own country.

The mother and daughter with whom I escaped from Amalfi soon went on to Varenna on Lake Como, and after a week or two I joined them at their hotel, where I stayed a long time, feeling very ill, but always hoping that in such a lovely place I should recover. Instead I grew worse and worse, knowing that I ought to go home, but so dreading the journey that I put off my departure from day to day till at last, feeling it was now or never, I summoned up enough courage to leave.

The journey was a nightmare upon which I need not dwell, and to add to my misery, by the time I reached Dover, owing I suppose to an inability to think clearly about anything, I had under-estimated the money I should need, and hadn't a penny left. It was then, as on many other occasions when I have returned to England after living abroad, that I felt my own countrymen to be the kindest in the world.

When a porter picked up my hand luggage to carry is to the train at Dover I said desperately:

"I ought to tell you that I've run out of money, and have nothing to pay you with."

"That's all right, lady!" he returned; and when I again apologized after he had found me a carriage and arranged everything comfortably, he looked at me, and seeing, I suppose, that I was ill, his voice was full of sympathy. "Don't you worry, lady! It's a pleasure," said this born gentleman.

I am in full agreement with my brother-in-law, Peter

Thorp, who says he divides mankind into *types*, not *classes*. "There's the vulgar type and the aristocratic type, and each of them can be found in all so-called 'classes,' be they high or low," he declares, and I am with him.

This is undoubtedly true, but the trouble is that as the "working class" is so much larger than any of the others, their least worthy members are more in evidence than the "vulgarian types" in the classes "above them," and I confess that while I like and admire certain individuals, viewed in the *mass* I often find myself detesting them. When I see them at holiday times driving in charabancs, shouting and screaming, or defiling some beautiful stretch of country by scattering paper bags, orange peel, cigarette ends, right and left, in spite of all the broadcast appeals that are periodically made to them on the subject of "litter," my feeling towards them is, to say the least of it, not affectionate.

"That's nothing. You ought to see this place after a Bank Holiday!" the lodge-keeper at the beautiful park at Knole once remarked to me when I made some indignant comment upon a picnic party's behaviour there; and I have only to think of the race-course after Derby Day, or Hampstead Heath when Bank Holiday is over, to be filled with disgust.

And then perhaps I read of a mining disaster and of the heroism of the volunteers who risk their own lives in the attempt to save their fellows; of the patience of the unemployed, of their kindness to one another in the midst of their own need, and I feel abashed.

I suppose the paradoxical truth is that the individuals who form the crowd are infinitely better than the resultant crowd! The herd is generally atrocious, the individual often admirable and of infinitely more importance than the thing they call "The State" in Russia, Italy, or Germany.

I suppose humanity in the mass is distasteful to me, for I dislike a crowd of any kind, or of any class. Indeed my feeling towards the mass as opposed to the individual is so strong that though a committee can scarcely be called a "crowd," I have always hesitated to serve on one, even if it should be composed of members of my own craft, and the only time I succeeded in overcoming this unsocial phobia, I live to regret having done so. Far from boasting of this peculiarity, I deplore its existence and admire those committee men and women who work so hard for the public weal, and evidently enjoy their activities.

"I wish I liked the human race.
I wish I liked its silly face!"

I'm sure Sir Walter Raleigh did not mean a word of this! Nor, of course, do I. But his couplet amuses me, nevertheless, and—low be it spoken—I own to a sneaking sympathy with the sentiment!

But to finish with this, my last, visit to Italy. Directly my brother-in-law, Dr. Buttar, saw me he hurried me off to specialists, who diagnosed blood-poisoning, contracted possibly at Amalfi when the fall of thousands of tons of soil must have let loose a corresponding number of germs. I can only tell those who have never suffered from it that blood-poisoning is a most horrible complaint, takes years to drive from the system, and I have never, I think, entirely recovered from it.

EBURY STREET

CIRCUMSTANCES have caused me to change my dwelling so often that I sometimes get confused as to where I was living when this or that happened, but I know it was some time after I returned from my last visit to Italy that I went to Ebury Street, which in some ways I liked better than any of my other London homes. Certainly it was the most convenient so far as position is concerned. I had a self-contained maisonette in that street, comprising the ground floor and the basement of a house which, alas, was damp, and eventually the cause of my leaving it for my present Chelsea home.

In Ebury Street I had distinguished neighbours. Noel Coward lived almost exactly opposite, and two or three doors farther on stood the house in which George Moore lived and died. It seems almost incredible, but throughout the four or five years I lived within sight of his front door, I never once saw him! I knew him very slightly, but I remember with amusement the only time I exchanged more than the few words of greeting that pass between acquaintances who meet in a crowded room.

On that occasion I think it was in Gerald Kelly's studio, long before I went to Ebury Street, he came and sat down beside me.

"You knew Clara Christian, I think, Miss Syrett?"

"Oh yes, very well at one time," I answered. "When she and Ethel Walker were together." (She had gone to Ireland with George Moore, left him after a year or two and, with his blessing, as I heard, married a friend

of his and died—poor Clara!—before her baby was born.)

“Ah! Charming woman! Charming woman!” he said mournfully.

“And so amusing!” I supplemented.

He turned his head sharply.

“*Amusing?* In what way amusing?”

“Well, for one thing, such a wonderful mimic, wasn’t she?”

“*Mimic?*” He was evidently astounded.

There was a moment’s silence, and then he asked anxiously, “Did she ever mimic *me*?”

It was with some difficulty that I refrained from laughing aloud, and managed some evasive reply. He was so palpably afraid that the answer would be in the affirmative, and I, remembering how often (before she so amazingly became infatuated) Clara had convulsed us with laughter at her clever “George Moore impersonations,” was divided between amusement at his vanity and contempt for an egotism so complete that he could live with a woman and never discover her to be a wit.

In looking over what I have already written I see that in the early pages of these “selected” reminiscences there is a threat to say something about book reviewing.

Personally, at all events till recently, I have had what is called “a good press.” That is to say, I have had long and, more often than not, eulogistic reviews for my novels, so perhaps it is hypercritical to complain that there have been few criticisms from which I have *learnt* anything. I should like to have done so, for though circumstances have forced me to write too much, and no one better than I knows that this is unfortunate, I have always *wished* to write as well as I could.

The novel—at its best—is a serious form of art, and

considered as at least an attempt to keep this in mind on the part of the author, a string of adjectives, however laudatory and lavishly sprinkled, does not constitute helpful criticism. But to be honest, worthless though the merely eulogistic review may be, it is at least gratifying, while one that proves the book to have been not even cursorily read is distinctly the reverse, and especially when the notice is signed with a well-known name.

"*Miss Syrett's delineation of the Slav mentality*," said no less a critic than Edward Garnett of a novel of mine, "*is not very convincing*."

It would have been strange indeed if I had endowed a girl, whose respective parents were an English grocer and the daughter of an English physician, with "Slav mentality"! But how inconsiderate of me to call the child of this union by a Russian name, even if it *was* bestowed upon her as a compliment to her Russian godmother! When a girl's name is *Natasha*—well! . . .

Another notice I remember with some amusement as an instance of how political opinions as well as foreign names may lead a critic astray. "*The rise of the Independent Labour Party as described by Miss Syrett is grotesque*," wrote a fierce Socialist in some "left" paper—was it *The Clarion*?—when she purported to review my novel *Rose Cottingham Married*—the joke being that every word describing that political group was written by someone within the party! Aware that I knew nothing about the I.L.P., I bought a little book written by one of its members, and in making an incidentally charming old Socialist describe its beginnings to the heroine, I carefully paraphrased the information it contained. I am therefore faced with two alternatives. Either the writer of *The Independent Labour Party*, by a member, knew nothing about his subject (which seems unlikely), or it was the reviewer who was ignorant. I incline to the latter

hypothesis, for it is emotion, as experience has taught me, not knowledge, that sways the political fanatic, whether of the "Left" or the "Right," and the trend of my novel being very mildly towards the latter "ideology," unreasonable annoyance took the place of criticism.

Then there was the all-knowing American reviewer who said of my photographically accurate description of Myra Lodge and the "North London," "Such a school never could and never did exist anywhere."

But I *went* to that non-existent school!

The last two examples, however, do at least prove that some part of the novels had been *read*—and that is something.

Conscientious reviewers there certainly are. Good as well as conscientious ones also exist, but I wish they were more numerous.

I write quite dispassionately on this subject, for nowadays, having as a novelist reached that dull eminence known as "established," I receive very little attention of any kind from modern reviewers. Nor do I complain. It is the turn of the young ones to receive the long notices that once were mine, and if I could think more of them valuable in ways other than mere publicity, I should be perfectly content.

This, by way of the new and presumably young reviewers, brings me to the new and certainly young writers, and when I speak of them I do so for my own gratification and merely from interest in modern novelists. What chiefly strikes me about their work is its superiority of technique as compared with that of beginners when I was young. The modern young people are infinitely more mature than at their age were we, the older writers.

Where we fumbled, they are at ease. They make our tentative efforts at writing appear childish, crude, unformed; and even while as a rule I personally find what they say chaotic, pessimistic, and defeatist in tone, I recognize their ability. Not that their pessimism should be a matter for wonder. They have grown up in an atmosphere different from ours—these post-war young people. Our childhood and youth were passed in a peaceful world that we accepted as the natural normal background to existence. *Their* background has been one of unrest, fear, change, and it is this material and spiritual chaos that is reflected in what they write. It is quite comprehensible that it should be so, and in deploring certain notes in their work I realize that only the best and strongest of them will struggle out of the slough of despond in which they are caught, or, better still, refuse to let it engulf them.

Self-pity, a readiness to blame "society" (and this always means "capitalist society") for the weaknesses and vices of their characters are the chief features in too many modern novels. Communism of the Russian type is the fashion among the young *intelligentsia* (as for that matter, among many who are no longer young, also), and I often wonder why. To me, common sense alone makes it apparent that the brand of communism they admire *could* not be carried out except under a reign of terror for those who are not numbered with the proletariat. But as in Russia to belong to the proletariat is tantamount to being numbered with the saints, perhaps that is the answer to my question. No one else counts, and "terror" for those of the bourgeoisie who haven't been "liquidated" doesn't matter. I find it difficult to take this point of view. I still wonder why this worship of a class (there are, officially, no classes in Russia, but my bourgeois mentality persists)—of a

class then, which though it doubtless includes many excellent individuals, huge as it is, must also include the stupidest, the mentally and morally least worthy members of the population.

I am told that even if such members exist, education will redeem them. Will it? Can education, and strictly censored "education" at that, give *quality* of brain? If I thought so, a glance at some of the faces in those proletarian groups which so often appear in our newspapers would undeceive me. But even so, say my earnest young instructors, the educated *children* of these unteachables will more than justify the ideology of this Utopia. Again, will they? There is, or used to be, something called heredity which, in my opinion, counts for a good deal more than it is the fashion to-day to admit.

But I am aware of the futility of argument while youthful writers are guided by the red star. Haven't they spent the inside of a fortnight in Russia (travelling Intourist), so ought not they to know "what bliss awaits us there"? What does it matter that they can speak no word of the language? What does it matter that men and women of varying nationality, who have lived in the country before, during and after the Revolution, say that the sum of human misery since Tsarist days, bad as these were, has greatly increased? They are only musty back numbers with "bourgeois mentality." What does it matter that working men from other lands, full of enthusiasm for the Soviet state, may return to tell of their terrible disillusion? They are not believed. Their books are not read. They are in the pay of Fascist governments, out to wreck the brave new world.

So the pity of it is that this mania for a régime based of necessity upon terrorism and espionage, lest "class

enemies" should undermine it, colours all that our young intellectuals write—all that they write so ably, with such skill, so infinitely better than anything I could do at their age and after. It is—to me at least—a misplaced enthusiasm, engendering sympathy for the half-baked, the lazy, the criminal, who to these enthusiasts are victims of a capitalist society. In nine cases out of ten truth shows them to be the kind of people who would be what they are anyhow, in any circumstances, under any form of government.

Just after writing the above I picked up my morning paper and happened to read a review by Harold Nicolson of a book called *Persons in Hiding*, by J. Edgar Hoover, the American Director of Police. It contains a paragraph curiously relevant to what I have been saying.

"Mr. Hoover does not agree with those who argue that crime is a product of slum conditions, unhappy home life, or insufficient education," Mr. Nicholson writes. "He shows that most of his criminals came from small towns or farms; that in almost every case they were adored and spoilt by their parents, and that their education was often above the average of that of most decent citizens."

We have recently here in England, in a certain jewel robbery with violence, had an example of the same kind of thing.

There is far too much sentimental nonsense talked and written about capitalistic society "manufacturing criminals among the workers"—*manual* workers, of course, for so seldom are brain workers mentioned by our youngest *intelligentsia*, whose favourite theme is the lives of the

proletariat, that one might almost imagine them nonexistent.

Of such amenities as free libraries, museums, art galleries, clinics, nursery schools, parks, and gardens—open to every one who cares to make use of them—we scarcely ever hear anything at all. This omission struck me very forcibly as I read not long ago a highly praised and in some respects excellent story by a woman, presumably young, and certainly communistic.

Her out-of-work hero, though a member of the lower middle class, has received a good education, and I could not help wondering why, instead of strumming on a banjo, gossiping with his landlady, playing with the cat, just to "kill time," the boy did not occasionally take a book and sit in some park, or go to a Free Library, or learn something at the South Kensington Museum?—all of these mitigations of his terrible boredom being within easy walking distances of his lodging, as I who live close to the part of London in which the novelist places it can testify. Heaven forbid that I should seek to minimize the tragedy of his unemployment. Yet may one not be forgiven for thinking that an educated youth might have made better use of his enforced leisure? Especially as though not too well fed he was by no means starving. A man with any grit would certainly have done so, and if the writer of this in many respects interesting and touching novel doubts it, I commend to her notice two, among many, autobiographies which bear out my assertion. One is Lord Snell's account of his early life and the difficulties he surmounted; the other, Frank Swinnerton's brave and sensible book, lightened by its author's humorous outlook on life, and, what is more uncommon nowadays, informed with a sense of decency and right living.

But a suggestion of this kind seldom appeals to a

writer out to glorify communist Russia at the expense of capitalist England.

I sometimes wish I could decide which of the two brands of tyranny in Europe to-day I most dislike. On the surface so different, but in their brutality, their disregard of human life, their sacrifice of the individual to some idol they call the State, so essentially alike. I can only hope that in time better designs for living will arise among the nations.

Our own system of government, heaven knows, is not beyond reproach. Much as I love England, I cannot pretend to think it a country without grave defects. There is muddle and waste, and all the inefficiency that a democracy almost inevitably entails.

But I give fervent thanks that at least so far, even in public, one may criticize anything and everything without a furtive glance over the shoulder lest a member of the secret police should be within hearing; and without the dread either of a concentration camp or a firing-squad. To me it seems self-evident that continued *reforms* in a system built up slowly for hundreds of years of trial and error and gradual change are better worth working for than the substitution of another "ideology" (that boring but inescapable word), whether Communist or Fascist.

It is, of course, quite useless to expect the youthful writers of the "Left" to share my opinion, but I cannot but think it a pity that they should be encouraged in their propaganda by certain older writers whose motives I shrewdly suspect to be none of the purest.

There is a certain type of literary woman (she may have her male counterpart, though I have not met him), generally middle-aged, often the mother of sons and

daughters in various stages of adolescence, so desperately afraid of being "out of the movement" that she will applaud anything and everything written by the most "advanced" of the young intellectuals, however destitute of clear thought, beauty, or even of sense, it may be.

She will see a play which a less "superior" individual with a critical faculty at least equal to her own, and possibly greater common sense, finds a pretentious muddle-headed piece of propaganda rather than a work of art, and speak of it as a masterpiece. Why? Because it is written by a member of the *intelligentsia* who happens to be in the limelight, and to criticize it adversely would prove her a "back number." She will discuss with portentous gravity the autobiography of a young man whose conceit is at least equal to his cleverness, and hail an unintelligible poem with rapture, though I am ready to swear that pressed for an answer to the simple question, "What does it mean?" for all her contemptuous glances at the inquirer, she would be hard put to it to find a reply. Because a certain section of the most "advanced" young is nothing if not hard-boiled, atheistic, and contemptuous of sentiment, to the type of middle-aged writer I am considering, anything that approaches tenderness, or suggests, however faintly, a non-materialistic outlook, is "sob stuff," to be swept aside as unworthy of consideration.

To me this desperate endeavour not to lag behind is pathetic.

It is one thing to keep an open mind about new ideas, and new forms of expressing them, if either or both seem honest attempts to contribute something of value to life and letters. Quite another to praise everything ultra-modern merely on *account* of its "modernity" or, what is worse—because one is afraid of losing "face" with the youngest generation.

A re-reading of *The Emperor's New Clothes* would do some of these faint yet pursuing matrons no harm, and might lead them incidentally to consider the many young writers who, though less conspicuously in the limelight than some of their contemporaries, less prone perhaps to startle by sickening descriptions of squalor, or by the portrayal of vice and abnormality, are doing excellent work.

Not that I am arguing against the artist's right to choose his own subject, and to treat it as he pleases. With one reservation I would not only concede that right, but vigorously uphold it. That reservation is that it must be done *dispassionately* and with no attempt to claim sympathy for vice, or applause for what, to all but deliberately perverse minds, is despicable.

Fortunately the gloom which characterizes many of the younger writers does not extend to the non-writing younger generation as a whole. Most of them, thank heaven, are enjoying life—and in spite of the excesses of the comparatively small but flood-lit set known as Bright Young Things, enjoying it sanely. They are gay and charming, and even when they are also intelligent, much more occupied with their parties, their love affairs, their sports, than with the parlous state of the world in which they find themselves. And who can blame them? Certainly not I!

It is good to laugh; "a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun"; and I think we older ones do well to be cheerful and refuse to take a defeatist view of life. Nevertheless, I understand and sympathize with those young artists, many of whom I like and admire so much, in their bewilderment. They cannot keep out of what they write the chaos in their own minds, and probably many of the thinking young suffer more than the old, who have learnt

to accept what of this present existence is left to them philosophically.

The boys and girls of to-day feel that even the material background of their lives is unstable, precarious, little to be trusted to endure, and for most of them a *spiritual* background is non-existent. Appeals made to them by dignitaries of the Church are always based on the assumption that they have not so much forsaken as *ignored* "religion," the better to indulge, if not in riotous living, at least in the pursuit of gaiety. All they have to do, say the shepherds, is to return to the fold, and there find peace and happiness.

I do not deny that in some instances this may be true. But for the great majority of thinking people in this year of grace, whether young or old, a return to the fold is impossible, because they no longer believe what the shepherds tell them. Yet if ever the world needed a spiritual background of some kind, it is to-day. I believe that such a background will in time be found. It will be different from the old one, no doubt. It may lack a creed of any kind. But it will be a satisfying one, nevertheless, a background that will make this present life hopeful, interesting, well worth living.

But to turn to a subject I once knew something about, and now because it has changed so much since my youth I have only one or two impressions to record.

Education, as once it seemed probable, was to be my chief interest in life. Instead, except for three years as a practising member of the profession, my teaching was only a side-line; a pleasant one, indeed, but not my real work. Now it is many years since I had anything to do with it at all, and I know only vaguely to what extent educational ideas and theories have altered since my Swansea and London Polytechnic days ended.

Elementary education, for instance, I can only judge by the results which happen to come under my notice, and these I am bound to confess are not encouraging. However good the teaching may be in Council schools, the voices and the accents of children of working-class parents have not improved. From my Chelsea flat, fortunately high above the road, though little softened by this circumstance, I hear them on their way to and from school shouting to one another in ugly ear-splitting voices, and in a language which, though I know it must be English, is almost unintelligible. We spend millions on free education—and this is one of the results. It seems a pity. But while elementary schools continue to be staffed by men and women of the same class as their pupils, I see no remedy for it. It is frequently said that the home influence of the children accounts for bad voices and worse accents. They speak as their parents speak. But compulsory free education has been in existence since 1876. It is a long time. The parents and grandparents, even the great-grandparents, of the present generation went to school in their youth, and if good English had been spoken and taught by a correspondingly long chain of teachers, the effect by this time should be at least noticeable.

It is not. It grows worse. For now American slang from the "talkies" is mingled with a speech and an accent which increasingly becomes the horrible jargon common to the greater number of England's citizens. Apart from the ruination of a fine language, one might think that, in their own interests, members of the working class, ambitious for their children, if not for themselves, would recognize the handicap of illiterate speech, and demand a better standard of teaching in this respect.

Unfortunately a bad accent, slipshod diction, and an

ugly quality of voice seem no bar to social promotion nowadays. When I listen (teeth on edge) to talks on the wireless by certain men and women who presumably *do* hold excellent posts, I often wonder why it hasn't been possible to find individuals equal in brain power and considerably better as to diction to fill them. It might not be amiss to consider the poor gentry once in a while as candidates for posts now filled by people who murder the King's English. But doubtless this idea is too "bourgeois."

As a nation, in my opinion, we speak disgracefully. Think only of the stage, where among the younger actors and actresses good diction is, to put it mildly, almost non-existent. I am not deaf, but when I go to the theatre I find it impossible to hear what most of the young things say, unless, as very infrequently happens, I am in or near the front row of the stalls. Some little time ago, when Richard Pryce's play, *Frolic Wind*, was given, most of the parts were filled by the older actresses trained in their youth to speak well and clearly, and if I were a dictator I should have ordered every actor and actress under thirty to go to the Royalty Theatre and take a lesson from their beautiful diction. In one scene of that play, Henrietta Watson, sitting at the end of a dinner table with her *back* to the audience, made every word she uttered audible all over the house.

As lecturers and public speakers also, how bad as a rule we English people are! And as for singers, it is the rarest chance to be able to catch more than a word now and again of the poem, ostensibly the theme of the song. Yet what an added pleasure it is when beautiful words set to beautiful music can be heard.

Why don't we wake up and learn to use our fine language well?

As usual, whenever I have written anything on any subject whatever, I see that subject in print immediately afterwards, and for the past few days my morning paper has been full of angry letters about the education for the multitude upon which we spend millions. My ignorance of modern elementary school teaching would prevent me from joining in the fray, even if laziness did not. But at least I *do* know what a small proportion of children of any class justify what is spent on the academic side of their education. In my form at Swansea, and later also at the Polytechnic, there were forty children, and of these about fifteen out of the forty were worth teaching. By this I do not mean that the rest were necessarily unintelligent. In many cases far from it. But their gifts lay in unacademic directions, and I have often thought that at a certain age and stage in *all* schools there should be a drastic division of the academic sheep from the often lively and useful goats. The former (upon whom no aspersion is cast by the word *sheep*) should have the best obtainable mental food, the latter, the kind of training to encourage the practical side of life.

The schemes of education devised for the so-called privileged classes appear to be legion, but of them, so far as I can discover, the "go-as-you-please" system appears to prevail. In this connection a picture in a more or less recent number of *Punch* recurs to me. It represents a disconsolate little girl seated on the floor, murmuring, "Must I *always* do exactly as I like?" There is sound child psychology here, as I know from my teaching experience, and also from a very vivid memory of my own early years. Much as children resent too many rules, they have a disquieting sense of being "lost," abandoned, if there are none at all. Instinctively most of them know they are not capable of

running their own lives without a certain amount of help and supervision from grown-up people, and they prefer a frame within which to live, so long as the frame does not fit too closely. It is, of course, an excellent thing to foster a spirit of self-reliance by giving them very considerable liberty, but in my opinion a great dis-service to their development when they are subject to no discipline at all.

"Self-expression" has become a rather ridiculous phrase, and like most other slogans, one of vague meaning. Surely its acceptance as a working proposition depends on the kind of self to be expressed? I can think of several that I would go out of my way to eliminate, as much in the child's interest as in my own!

I remember years ago spending a month with a group of parents and their children in a country house. Most of the parents were socialists and members of societies for the reformed training of the young. All of them were intellectuals, and full of theories about education. I never met such a set of bad-mannered and (here is my point) *thoroughly discontented* children as theirs!

I had joined the colony for the sake of a friend whose tendency to share some of the educational and ethical theories of these acquaintances of hers was mercifully checked by a sense of humour which my frivolous attitude to them encouraged.

The week-ends were the best opportunities for observing the theories put into practice, for then high-brow mammas were sometimes joined by papas whose brows were set at an even loftier altitude. Sundays, I remember, were generally chosen by the parents to take a walk with their respective young up a grassy hill that was visible from the garden. The party would set out, sweet reasonableness in the eyes and facial expressions

of the elders as they shepherded their flock. Half an hour later, as I used to prophesy to my friend, we might expect to hear the flock "expressing itself" on the downward path with angry screaming, whining complaints, or defiant shouts at harassed parents, surprised at the failure of "sweet reasonableness" with children who were never corrected, never taught consideration for others, and never, of course, punished. Before the procession reached the garden my disillusioned friend and I usually fled to enjoy, at a safe distance, hilarity that would doubtless have been ill received.

Only in the small families, that even many years back had begun to take the place of the large ones I remember, could such theories as the right of children to unlimited "self-expression" be even attempted to put into practice. There were six of us under ten in my childhood, and if we had all been allowed to express ourselves at the same time in one nursery, our nurses would have had all the nervous breakdowns they deserved.

Speaking as an outsider, and only from instances of its results that have come my way, I am inclined to think that though modern education at its best is excellent in so far as it makes learning interesting, even exciting to the young, it does little to encourage grit and perseverance. It is a good thing, surely, for children sometimes to have to do and to learn things they do not like, for I cannot see how otherwise they will be able to cope with much that adult life will force upon them in both respects.

So while I rejoice that their *happiness* is now infinitely more considered than it was in my young days, I should like to see a little more stress laid upon the sterner virtues that a certain amount of discipline teaches.

THE SHELTERING TREE

I cannot help believing that much of the self-pity and general disgruntlement, so apparent in much of the writing of the talented young nowadays, springs from the lack of any sort of training in self-control in their still earlier youth.

"SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE
MADE ON"

I HAVE always had a very full and busy dream life, much *too* busy and *too* worrying for my taste, but to me, at least, interesting in retrospect. As a very young child I used now and then to walk in my sleep, and on the first of these occasions I cannot have been more than three or four years old, for I have only a dim memory of waking in the darkness of a stone-flagged passage a long way from the night nursery, roused no doubt by the coldness of the stones to my bare feet. My frightened screaming must have roused the household, for the next thing I recall is being carried upstairs in my father's arms.

Another time, when I was older, I awoke amazed to find myself dressed and just about to open the bedroom door. On yet another occasion, before our nurse had gone to bed, I reached the day nursery, and she led me back to my own room without waking me. But these nocturnal excursions fortunately ceased some time before I went to school in London.

Since then I have had several dreams of the kind known to psychologists, or rather to workers at Psychical Research, as *precognitive*. One of them I have already mentioned in connection with the Messina earthquake, when a week or two before it happened I dreamt of some disaster which at the time filled me with terror, but I did not connect with the Messina catastrophe till on the night of the earthquake in Florence, the sound of rushing footsteps in the street outside re-

minded me that I had heard the sound before in my sleep a few weeks previously.

Another apparently precognitive dream is rather interesting, because, though I dreamt it years ago, I have only recently discovered exactly what it was I saw and mentally took part in, some time before the actual event happened. . . .

I thought I was in a carriage driving through a street in a foreign town that was be-flagged from end to end. Someone was with me, but who my companion may have been, if I knew at the time, I forgot on waking. What remained as a very distinct impression lasting some time was a feeling of delighted triumph—about something. The nature of that “something” I had completely forgotten when I woke, for all that remained was the memory of an *exultation*, to which I could assign no cause.

This was so long ago that I cannot remember whether a few weeks or only a few days elapsed before I saw a photograph in one of the daily papers of a street decorated with flags, and *recognized* it. I read that the town containing that street was Fiume, but for some reason (probably because I was in a hurry at the time) I did not look at the letterpress. It was only a few weeks ago when I read an obituary article on D’Annunzio that, not being politically minded, I knew anything about the dramatic “coup” of 1919, when with an army he had raised he took possession of Fiume.

Now why *I*, who had no part or lot in the matter, knew nothing of the annexation of Fiume and therefore nothing about the excitement it must have caused, should have experienced that sense of exultation, who can tell? Are we human beings all parts of one great whole? Is it possible for an individual to tune in to

that whole, and experience some emotion of which in his own normal personality he is completely ignorant and, at least in normal life, indifferent?

These are some of the questions to which Psychological Research is striving to give answers.

At the time I was visited by these two possibly pre-cognitive dreams I knew nothing about psychical research. If I had, I should have made a note of them on waking, properly dated and witnessed, since it is only by the accumulation and analysis of such cases that psychic science can progress. As it is, from the point of view of evidence, these experiences, which might have been of value had they been duly recorded at the time, are now only of interest to *me*, and to those who, knowing me, take my word for their occurrence.

Apparently it is no uncommon experience for the dreamer to share the emotions, or at any rate to know something, about people entirely unconnected with him. There are several examples of this in a recently published and most excellent book by Mr. G. N. M. Tyrrell, called *Science and Psychical Phenomena*, and I remember also at least one example in Mr. Dunne's *Experiment with Time*. This was a case of foreknowledge about a fire in a factory with which the dreamer had nothing to do. Nor is the faculty (extra-sensory perception, as it is now called) confined to dreams.

Here is an instance of it in waking life out of my own experience.

Some months ago, as I crossed the room to turn on the wireless just before a symphony concert began, one of those random thoughts to which one attaches no importance flashed into my mind. Visualizing the large orchestra in the Queen's Hall, it occurred to me

what a fuss and bother it would make should any member of it be taken ill during the performance.

My clock must have been slow, for to my annoyance the music had begun. But even before I had time to go back to the fire to listen, it stopped, and I heard a scuffling noise as of seats being pushed aside. After a few moments the orchestra began again, going back to the beginning of the concerto, or whatever it had been playing. Next day I read in my paper of a "somewhat unusual incident" at the Queen's Hall. A member of the orchestra, having been taken ill, was obliged to leave his place after the concert had begun. Except perhaps for the poor man himself, this little experience was trivial enough. But it does point either to foreknowledge or to telepathy, and if to either (or both), the point of interest is that the two people concerned were unknown to one another.

"Coincidence" perhaps is the explanation. But there are too many of these "coincidences" to please the materialistic mind that denies the possibility of extra-sensory perception, and will go to absurd lengths in an attempt to disprove it. An outstanding example of such mentality has just been given us in Mr. Sturge-Whiting's effort to prove that *An Adventure*, the best authenticated story we possess of the mystery of Time, was a "pathetic illusion" on the part of two distinguished ladies with educated, trained minds, who spent eleven years in verifying what they had "seen" at Versailles of certain events in the eighteenth century. I have read his book, and read it carefully enough to say that it is a singularly unconvincing effort on the part of Mr. Sturge-Whiting, and proves nothing, except a readiness to deny the existence of super-normal faculties.

In the Hamilton Terrace house, which I have called

my House of Dreams, nearly all of these had one peculiar quality. I could never make up my mind as to when I really did *wake*, for the dreams followed one another on any given night with such rapidity that I became bemused.

I would open my eyes in the darkness after a particularly vivid one (or *thought* I opened them), turn on the light and find myself in my own bedroom. Very well. But was I *really* awake? I would pinch my arm to see—and feel the pinch. There was the book I had been reading before I slept, I would remember its title—and then take it up and verify it. So surely I *must* be awake? But to make assurance doubly sure I would go to the window, for if the scene outside was the one I knew in waking life, that would *completely* settle the question. So, as it seemed to me, I used to get out of bed, and crossing to the window, pull the curtain aside to look. And nearly always the scene disclosed was different!

On one occasion the garden I normally knew appeared much bigger than the narrow, tree-filled space behind our house. Moreover, though it ought to have been dark, the sun was shining and a strong breeze was blowing back against the wall of the house the flowers in a border that normally was non-existent. The flowers were pink monthly roses interspersed with big clumps of forget-me-nots, all shaking in the wind.

I did not remember getting back to bed, but as I was there when I was called in the morning, the whole apparent waking, and the performance of testing my awakeness, as well as the sun-filled garden, may have been a dream.

There is, of course, no means of proving it, but I would give much to know if I saw that garden as it once existed. The house was at least a hundred years old, and a hun-

dred years ago what is now the busy thoroughfare called Maida Vale at the back of the terrace of houses must have been a country road, bordered by large gardens. Some quite spacious ones still stretched behind certain houses when I lived in Hamilton Terrace during part of the war, though now, I expect, flats cover their site.

Of that particular and amazingly "real" dream, I shall never know whether what I saw was retrogressive vision. But of another equally vivid one there is some remaining information that may be taken as fairly good evidence of the recall of a scene from the past.

I was at number seven Soho Square at the time, in the flat I shared with my friend Mollie Clugston, and I thought I was in the large room belonging to her which I have already described.

I saw it just as it normally existed, except that instead of a grate, the big fireplace was empty, forming an archlike entrance to a passage. I walked through the fireplace, quite unperturbed, by being able to do so, on to the path which sloped steeply downwards, and presently found myself in what I realized was a shop, though not at all like a modern one. It had wooden stands, over which were flung piles of dress material, chiefly muslins and other gauzy stuffs. The place, more like a very large room than a shop, was filled with women, evidently customers, for they were turning over, and every now and then holding up, some of these materials, which young men were obviously trying to sell to them. The women were attired in what I called to myself "fancy dress." It is at this point I so regret not having made notes and described at the time the *kind* of dress, for now I cannot be sure whether the information I only yesterday acquired has coloured my memory of the period their clothes represented. As I think of them *now*, I see them in very full crinoline

skirts, and the poke bonnets, flower- and feather-trimmed, of early Victorian days, and though to the best of my belief that *was* the period I saw, I cannot absolutely swear to it. But so vivid was the whole scene that on waking I could not at first realize that I had dreamt—not witnessed—it.

I spent Whitsuntide of the year 1938, in which I am writing, with my friend Mollie Clugston, at the country cottage which is now her home, and in talking about the old days in Soho Square I told her of this more than twenty years' distant dream of mine.

"There used to be a *bazaar* somewhere in Soho, but I don't know exactly where," she said. Nor did I know how to find out, till someone suggested Selfridge's Enquiry Bureau. I telephoned, and yesterday (as I write) received the news from that admirable office that the Soho Bazaar was founded in 1816, and lingered on till the early 'nineties, occupying the premises that are now Black's, the firm of publishers, next door to us, at numbers 4, 5, and 6, and later, so the account went on, at number seven, *our house*.

Next day I got the book from which this information was derived. It is called *The Romance of Soho Square*, and is written by Beresford Chancellor. In it I found that in *early Victorian days* the Bazaar was so popular that the carriages of the ladies who went to buy used to block the Square! I have never had a dream, or rather, as it seemed to me, a *vision* so clear, so life-like and *real*, as that shop of nearly a hundred years ago! Another example—possibly—of the mystery of Time, so many of which are lost as evidence, because they are not immediately recorded.

It is only of comparatively recent years that I have become interested in the branch of science known as

Psychical Research. But now I hold it as one of the most, if not *the* most, important subjects for human beings to study. I will even go so far as to say that knowledge of it is the only hope for a demented world. I am quite unable to understand the attitude of certain people, even very intelligent people, who never having given five minutes' consideration to it, contemptuously dismiss an inquiry to which such men as Wallace, Crookes, Richet, Flammarion, Lodge, Barrett, all of them scientists, have thought sufficiently important to devote years of their life.

In the preface to his recent enthrallingly interesting book, *Science and Psychical Phenomena*, Mr. G. M. N. Tyrrell says:

Probably no subject is more misunderstood than Psychical Research. By the general public it is supposed vaguely to have something to do with Spiritualism, if indeed it is not an alternative name for Spiritualism, and those who work in it are associated with crankiness and an amiable gullibility.

Mr. Tyrrell's approach to the subject is on such purely scientific lines that one understands his dislike of having Psychical Research regarded as "an alternative name" for Spiritualism, and as he writes a little later, associated with "mediums, ghosts, spooks, and spoof." But these latter words are, I think, unconsciously a little misleading. With "Spooks" and "Spoof" Psychical Research has certainly nothing to do. With mediums it *must*, to a great extent, concern itself, as Mr. Tyrrell's book amply shows, and "Ghosts" is only the name sometimes given to the "appearances," whatever they may prove to be, which at times are undoubtedly seen by certain people all over the world. I know that to some

minds the very word *medium* is anathema. But after all, what does it mean? Merely a person who either naturally, or through development, possesses faculties latent in *all of us*.

No one agrees more heartily than I about the worthlessness of "Spiritualism" as it is regarded by credulous, sentimental, and ignorant people. At the same time, I realize that in an inquiry which, like "religion," is as open to the veriest fool, or the most utter knave, as to the trained mind of the scientist, silliness, and, worse still, fraud, are bound to characterize certain of its adherents. There are, heaven knows, however, many religious cults quite as silly and occasionally as fraudulent as any to be found in "Spiritualism"; yet surely few of us on that account would condemn religion as unworthy of the attention of intelligent people?

To Mr. Tyrrell, evidently, it is the disclosure of unsuspected faculties in human beings that chiefly attracts him in the subject on which he writes so ably.

"The positive discoveries of Psychological Research," he says, *"are too big for us: the human faculties revealed are too far-reaching and ubiquitous. We are frightened and embarrassed by them, and strive to put our heads comfortably back under the sand. But the issue must be faced: its implications for all departments of human thought are too grave and too important to be met by a policy of evasion, and one of the subjects for which its importance is greatest is that of religion."*

To me, increasingly, the findings of Psychological Research seem of paramount importance for a world desperately in need of some kind of non-materialistic background to life's little day, and even for those engaged in it, but not yet convinced that survival has been proved,

the way to that conviction is along the lines indicated with so much rightly felt awe in the words I have just quoted.

Is it reasonable to suppose that the glimpses of such amazing and unsuspected faculties in human beings as those which *Psychical Research* reveals are destined to extinction by the change which we call death? I cannot think so. Nor, I venture to believe, will intelligent people who read *Science and Psychical Phenomena*, among other records of the work that is being done by certain open-minded scientists of to-day. I wish there were more of them! For the most formidable opposition to the belief in survival comes from those other scientists who, because they cannot face the abandonment of certain fixed materialistic ideas, behave like the theologians of Galileo's day, when they refused to look through his telescope in case what he told them should be true. To content themselves with cheap sneers at men whose approach to a new field of investigation is at least as scientific and careful as their own towards the material world does not seem to me a sporting attitude, to say the least of it.

In her recent book, *Personality Survives Death*, Lady Barrett, the well-known surgeon, quotes the remark of a colleague to her husband, Sir William Barrett, after a lecture of his on telepathy—a faculty whose existence by the majority of scientists was then contemptuously denied.

"A very interesting lecture, Barrett, but of course it's all tosh!"

"You are a scientist," replied Sir William, "so when you have given as many weeks' study to the subject as I have given years, your remarks will have some value for me."

I wish I could think there are many—whether scientists or laymen—who would receive such a rebuke in the spirit which, as Lady Barrett goes on to say, led the

first man not only to apologize but to study the subject for himself. For even if, unlike him, they did not become convinced, they would at least be behaving scientifically. The vast majority adopt instead the unintelligent attitude of point-blank denial without even a pretence at investigation. On one thing at least surely every one (except perhaps the reddest and hottest of communists) can agree, and that is the need for some kind of world-background that would make such wars as those now raging in Spain and China, with all their accompanying horrors, impossible. Impossible also such a pronouncement as the following, which I quote from an article in the Russian paper *The Red Star*, by Emilian Jaroslavski, President of the Militant Godless Ones' League. (Few Russians, I suppose, know the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. It is a pity!)

After explaining how necessary it is to create special anti-religious "cells" in every unit of the Red Army (I see the "Godless Ones" working like furry red bees in a poison comb!), this gentleman goes on to explain what the object of these "cells" must be. They should combat the destructively anti-social Christian doctrine about forgiving one's enemies, all men being brothers and all being equal before God, regardless of the class to which they belong.

"This article," says the correspondent to the *Telegraph*, writing from Moscow in July 1938, "is important because its veteran author combines the functions of Chief Official Atheist" (still mindful of the Mikado and the Lord High Executioner—the capital letters are mine) "and the post of President of the Central Control Committee."

I have often thought what an advantage a sense of humour would be to certain nations whose antics in

speech and behaviour to-day are calculated to make the gods laugh if they do not make the angels weep. But I am afraid that a sense of humour is a gift bestowed at birth and cannot be acquired even by prayer and fasting. It is a pleasant and useful gift, if not the highest to which mankind can aspire. There are other and even better ones—tolerance, for instance, a sense of justice, compassion, kindness. It is qualities such as these surely that the world must seek if there is ever to be an end of the insanity of war, and the nemesis that must follow cruelty, oppression, the stamping out of freedom; and though the present state of the world makes it unlikely that the quest in some quarters has even begun, I do not despair.

Parallel with the dark, gloomy stream of human thought and action, curiously enough there runs another one, and this stream of new knowledge is spreading. Hope for the world lies, as I believe, in the findings of Psychical Research—a difficult, complicated, elusive subject, out of which, however (though I am aware that the deduction is not one supported by all psychical research workers), to me, one simple belief emerges. It may be stated thus:

Death does not end life. Life is continuous, and there is progress and development in that continued life.

That is the background which, as I think, is being slowly created for the world through the work of pioneers who, ignoring alike the gibes of those who refuse investigation, and the imbecilities of the credulous sensationalists, are steadily continuing their work.

It is, of course, always possible that the world being of unsound mind just now may commit suicide before such a background has had time to establish itself. A misfortune, perhaps, though from the vantage point of

eternity not of much moment after all. But I believe there will be a return to sanity.

The writing of this book has made me realize that I have lived through a very interesting if latterly horrible phase of the world's history. How absurd any prophecy of a world war leading to drastic changes in the constitution of society as a whole would have seemed to me in my youth! But it has happened, and heaven alone knows what I, though well stricken in years, may yet live to see. It is useless to speculate. Meanwhile I remain calm, and as an onlooker find existence interesting and world affairs exciting. I go on writing partly, it is true, because I must, but, except when I am in a bad temper, still with a certain amount of zest and enjoyment, even though I have no illusions about the importance of my work. In a few years, or even less, everything I have written will be as dead as the dodo. Already my novels are being swamped by those of the beginners in the art of fiction, who in their turn are destined to be superseded by children now in the nursery.

But what does it matter? The interest and excitement of writing, with any luck, will sustain these newcomers for their lifetime, and no sensible person should ask of our transitory existence more than this. For it is much to have a difficult art to follow, and to do the best one can with words. It is uphill work to write, and from long experience I find it becomes no easier as time goes on to wrestle with the fine but difficult English language. But again, what does that matter? How dull and mechanical the exercise would become if it did!

So I salute the newcomers, the beginners, and with all my heart wish them good luck, and above all, as

THE SHELTERING TREE

much pleasure in their art as I, in spite of a good deal of grumbling and impatience, have found throughout my long career as a novelist.

Most of the good fortune as well as most of the disappointments of my life I prefer to keep to myself, but one at least of the blessings shall be stated. No woman ever had better and kinder friends than I, and of my friendships at least I can say, with only a slight alteration, in the beautiful words of one of the most beautiful of the Psalms:

"Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life."

Acc. No.	13272
Union No.	G. 10.
C. I. No.	1637